Assessing Student Learning Outcomes:

Riverside Community College District

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I.   Introduction

Systematic efforts to assess student learning outcomes at Riverside Community College District (RCCD) date from fall, 2000, with the formation of a district assessment committee (DAC) charged with the responsibility of developing and implementing a comprehensive assessment plan for the three-campus district. In 2000, RCCD was also completing an accreditation self-study (the accreditation visit itself occurred in spring, 2001), employing a ten-standard model that focused mostly on educational "inputs"—on general topics regarding institutional mission and integrity, educational programs, student support, faculty and staff, physical and financial resources, and governance. We became aware, however, that our accrediting commission was contemplating dramatic changes in the standards it would ask colleges to employ in future accreditation reports, shifting the focus from what the institution *does* to what its students can be shown to have *learned*. This shift from an emphasis on inputs to outputs—from teaching to learning—was one we learned was as part of a broader evolution in higher education, an evolution (some have described it as a paradigm shift) that the new accreditation standards only reflected. (Outcomes assessment, we discovered, had a 25-year history in American higher education, and our accrediting commission was the last one in the U.S. to embrace it.) Earlier than most community colleges in California, though later than some, RCCD resolved to get ahead of the assessment wave, to understand its nature and implications as well as we could, and to use its methodologies as effectively as possible to better our institution—and help our students.   We began doing outcomes assessment primarily as a response to extrinsic pressures to do so. But we eventually came to see assessment as intrinsically valuable, a practical method for improving programs, curriculum, teaching, and learning.

This report represents an effort to summarize the most significant activities RCCD has undertaken these past six years in the area of outcomes assessment. We anticipate that that annual updates to the document will be made henceforth, allowing any interested reader (both internal and external to the institution) to get a clear and current picture of what our efforts have consisted of and, at least to some extent, why we have chosen the areas of emphasis we have. This document focuses on RCCD's formal outcomes assessment efforts. All assessment theorists agree that informal assessment is something responsible instructors—and institutions—do continually. Whenever instructors teach a lesson, give an examination to determine in part whether their students have learned the lesson, and then adjust teaching practices or curriculum in light of the

information they gain about learning patterns in the course, they are "doing assessment." Whenever an institution looks at data related to student success or persistence, develops or modifies programs to improve those outcomes, and studies the new data to see whether the program has helped students learn more effectively, it is "doing assessment." RCCD's own shift to a learner-centered curriculum framework, approved by its Board of Trustees in 2002, formalizes what has <u>always</u> been its strong commitment to student learning.

II.   The RCC District Assessment Committee

A Brief History

RCCD's District Assessment Committee has been, for the past six years, a remarkably collegial and hard-working group of instructors, administrators, and support staff, with (occasional) student representation as well. It has been co-chaired by two people, a faculty member with substantial reassigned time (varying between 1.0 and .50 FTE as necessary) to act also as District Assessment Coordinator, and the Associate Vice President (more recently the title has changed to Associate Vice Chancellor) for Institutional Effectiveness. The committee was formed under the auspices of the RCCD Academic Senate as a kind of informal subcommittee of that body. Its relationship to the Senate—now three Senates on each of the three campuses—has been given more formal status in recent years by the decision to have two members of DAC from each campus elected by the faculty on those campuses, and to make these six members the only voting members of the committee. But all faculty and staff with an interest in outcomes assessment have been encouraged to join the committee, whether voted onto it or not, and so far DAC has been able to reach decisions by general consensus as opposed to formal voting. In addition to its chairs, DAC membership has typically included 10-15 faculty members (more in recent years), drawn from a wide variety of disciplines (and all three campuses), as well as (since 2004) the three RCCD Title V outcomes assessment specialists (one assigned to each campus), and at least one institutional researcher. Many DAC members have been with the committee throughout its six-year history.

DAC typically meets once a month during the academic year, for two hours on Friday afternoons, either just before or just after a meeting of the RCCD Program Review committee. As will be seen later, outcomes assessment is integrated into program review at RCCD, and we have found it helpful to coordinate the activities of the two committees as much as possible. From 2000 to 2004, the same two people co-chaired both committees. The same administrative position continues to be responsible for co-chairing both committees, but since 2004, the faculty co-chair of each committee is different. The faculty co-chair for PR serves on DAC, and the faculty co-chair for DAC serves on PR.

The specific duties and goals of DAC have evolved over the past six years. In general, its efforts have lain in the following (somewhat overlapping) areas:

- To study (and to stay current on) outcomes assessment in theory and practice, thereby becoming able both to formulate policy and to act as a learning resource for the district
- To develop and implement a district assessment plan

- To assist disciplines undergoing program review with the development and implementation of their own assessment plans, and to evaluate and recommend for approval those plans
- To help inculcate a "culture of assessment" at RCCD by (among other things) doing presentations, conducting workshops, developing an assessment website (**www.academic.rcc.edu/dac/**), sponsoring pilot projects intended to support instructor-developed classroom- and course-based assessment projects, etc.

From its inception, DAC has seen assessment primarily as a faculty-driven process for improving teaching and learning. It has tried to emphasize the practical value of assessment to instructors for bringing about improvement in student learning. It has worked to "sell assessment" to colleagues, in spite of resistance to assessment by some of those colleagues (often arising from ignorance or confusion about exactly what outcomes assessment is, though sometimes from deeply held and well considered philosophical objections to assessment) and by such broader bodies as the state Academic Senate. DAC believes, somewhat in conflict of the new accreditation standards, that its efforts to sell assessment to faculty would have been nearly impossible if instructors perceived it as a method of evaluating their own individual teaching performances. Accordingly, while it has encouraged instructors to use assessment information for self-improvement, it has consistently advocated (as have most assessment theorists) a separation of outcomes assessment from formal evaluation processes.

For somewhat similar reasons, DAC has never published minutes of its meetings or made them generally available in any form. It decided early on that while minutes obviously needed to be taken for internal purposes, it wanted to encourage the kind of freedom of expression among its members that public minutes tend to inhibit. DAC periodically reviews that decision in light of the obvious exigencies (accreditation perhaps the most obvious) that would make accessible committee meeting minutes useful. Ideally, though, the work of the committee has been made transparent enough through reports like the present one (and the extensive number of documents appearing on its website) that regular publication of minutes will not be necessary.

Yearly Overview

This report will present the chief activities of the committee in greater detail later on, but a chronological overview of DAC's major goals and accomplishments seems useful here.

2000-2001

The committee met for the first time on 1 December 2000 and agreed to meet thereafter every two weeks during spring, 2001. DAC spent much of this year familiarizing itself with the assessment literature, visiting nearby colleges already working on outcomes assessment (a visit to Palomar College on 11 May 2001 was particularly instructive), and beginning to establish the direction it would recommend RCCD take in outcomes assessment efforts. A central concern was where to begin assessment efforts at RCCD: on a smaller scale with the focus

on courses and classroom techniques, or on a larger scale, by defining learning outcomes for general education/degree recipients and assessing the level at which these outcomes are achieved. The consensus of the committee (reached at its meeting on 18 March 2001) was that RCCD should begin small: 1) by training faculty in the development and implementation of five to ten classroom-based pilot projects and 2) by integrating assessment with program review. We hoped that by focusing on the classroom and course level to begin with, we could more quickly generate useable assessment data and bring about more immediate improvement in teaching and learning (i.e., close the assessment loop). Concomitantly, DAC began to develop a statement of assessment principles, an assessment glossary, an assessment website (which now includes those statements), and an initial comprehensive district assessment plan.

2001-2002

Chief activities for this academic year included:

- Attendance by committee members at outcomes assessment conferences (with reports back to DAC), including the AAHE Assessment Conference in Denver in June, 2001 and the California Assessment Institute Conference, October 21 – 23, 2001.
- Development of an RCCD assessment website under the direction of a Library faculty member. The website has been an ongoing project since 2001 and contains a number of reports on assessment projects undertaken at the course and classroom level by RCCD faculty, as well as many other assessment resources.
- Coordination with the RCCD PR committee and the RCCD strategic planning consultant to integrate assessment into program review. By the end of this academic year, DAC developed and approved guidelines for disciplines undergoing program review that required them to begin assessment efforts by developing and implementing an assessment project for a particular course.
- Initiation of classroom-based assessment projects, involving eight faculty members from the disciplines of Computer Information Systems, English, History, and Mathematics. The project (paying $3000 to each participant) was announced in November, with applicants chosen and trained in assessment methods in early spring.

2002-2003

Chief activities for this academic year included:

- Completion (and evaluation) of classroom-based assessment projects (further information available on the DAC website), one of which evolved into a course-focused assessment project.

- Sponsorship of an RCCD Assessment Workshop on 13 September 2002, led by Dr. Larry Kelley, Executive Director of University Planning and Analysis at the University of Louisiana, Monroe.
- Refinement of assessment plan guidelines for disciplines undergoing program review.
- Initial development of an RCCD assessment plan.
- Intensive study of the new ACCJC accreditation standards in an effort to ensure that RCCD could meet them effectively during the 2007 accreditation visit.
- Preliminary discussion of institution-level outcomes assessment.
- Continued effort to act in an institutional pedagogical role by presenting at such venues as administration/faculty retreats, chair retreats, departmental meetings, etc.

2003-2004

Chief activities for this academic year included:

- Consultation with disciplines undergoing program review to ensure that their assessment plans were on target. DAC approved a number of discipline-based assessment plans, and sponsored workshops introducing assessment methodology to disciplines beginning program review.
- Administration of the CCSEQ (Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire) to 1,641 RCCD students in May as an indirect measure of student learning gains.
- Continuation of effort to define institution-level outcomes, specifically those associated with general education.
- Development of an inventory of institutional effectiveness measures, including Diversity Scorecard, KPIs, etc.
- Participation in the California Community College Learning Assessment Listserv, co-moderated by DAC's administrative co-chair.

2004-2005

Chief activities for this academic year included:

- Further refinement of general education student learning outcomes
- Support for efforts to interpret CCSEQ data.
- Continued consultation with disciplines undergoing program review; approval of additional discipline-based assessment plans; additional training sessions and workshops on assessment (including an all-day assessment workshop in February 2005 sponsored by the Research and Planning Group of the California Community Colleges in collaboration with the California Assessment Institute and attended by the great majority of RCCD faculty).

- Collaboration with RCCD curriculum committee to modify the course outline of record template so that it now asks for SLOs instead of learning objectives, and asks disciplines to link teaching methods and evaluation methods to specific SLOs as a way of making them operational.

2005-2006

Chief activities for this academic year included:

- Revision of program review guidelines to make assessment requirements clearer to disciplines.
- Continued consultation with disciplines undergoing program review; approval of additional discipline-based assessment plans; additional training sessions and workshops on assessment, including an all-day workshop on assessment conducted by Professor Norene Badway of the University of the Pacific in February, 2006, and attended by 40 faculty members. A similar three-day workshop was offered by campus leaders in assessment and program review in June to review these principles and work on implementation.
- Progress on defining and assessing general education outcomes, including administration of a survey on perceived learning gains to nearly 1000 graduating RCCD students. The CCSEQ was also administered again, to 1,555 students in spring 2006, partly to generate some longitudinal data about student learning. Discussion on additional, direct methods of assessing general education, including the development of portfolios meant to capture evidence of student achievement.
- Discussion of student learning outcomes for occupational programs. After much discussion undertaken by an occupational education taskforce, we determined that the diversity of unit requirements prevented us from comfortably identifying and assessing credential outcomes generically until we have assessed specific programmatic outcomes first (if then). We agreed to begin the process of program-level assessment in the occupational education programs with the next cycle of program review.
- Preliminary discussion of RCCD general education requirements themselves, in an effort to align them more directly with gen ed outcomes and determine ways of assessing them.
- Preliminary discussion of whether to join two national benchmarking projects that would enable us to use institutional research data more effectively for assessment purposes.
- Participation in planning for the first comprehensive outcomes assessment conference targeting California community colleges, "Strengthening Student Success," to be held in San Diego in October 2006. DAC members organized the math and English strands of the conference.

III.   RCCD Assessment Plan

Outcomes assessment has been called a "messy science," and it has been DAC's experience that efforts to systematize and regularize assessment at RCCD pose many challenges, to say the least. Nevertheless, we have moved in a fairly linear way from an initial preoccupation with engendering a climate of assessment at the institution through classroom- and course-based assessment methods to our current focus on institution-level outcomes. But while assessment has become a concern of all instructional areas of the institution, to a greater or lesser extent, we still have further to go in bringing its methodologies to bear on many non-instructional areas—and not all instructional disciplines have fully embraced assessment either. Here are the chief features of RCCD's assessment efforts as they exist at the end of the 2005-06 academic year. These efforts are substantial and cyclical enough to deserve to be called a plan.

1. **Assessment of individual courses and programs is required as part of the program review process**. As we explain in more detail below, RCCD has historically seen programs as academic disciplines, and DAC requires of all disciplines, as a condition of successful completion of program review, that they develop a comprehensive assessment plan, focusing on cyclical course-based assessment. Our best examples of assessment results being used to improve teaching and learning have been course-based and stimulated in large part by the program review requirements. We continue to refine the process and the role of assessment within it.
2. **Institution-level outcomes are being assessed, with general education outcomes defined and indirectly assessed through student surveys**. See below for a fuller description of our efforts to assess general education and other degree- and certificate-level outcomes.
3. **Program-level outcomes are beginning to be defined and assessed, particularly in the occupational education disciplines**. Service outcomes in such areas as counseling and the library have also been defined and assessed.
4. **A process for developing a comprehensive set of measures and processes that will enable the district to report on, assess, and improve its effectiveness is still in the initial planning stages.** The RCCD Office of Institutional Research continues to generate and report on data involving KPIs like retention, success, graduation and transfer rates, job placement, etc. From an assessment perspective, we continue to strive for ways of using that data more actively and consistently to improve learning in the institution.

IV.   Outcomes Assessment and Program Review

RCCD is a three-campus district in the process of becoming a three-college district (target date fall, 2008), with a common curriculum maintained throughout the district. All three campus/colleges have multidisciplinary departments, but curricular and instructional concerns are largely the province of the (multi-campus) disciplines, which meet regularly under the guidance of a "discipline facilitator." The program review process at RCCD was revived (after a period of dormancy) and substantially modified in fall, 2001. It conceives of disciplines—English, Mathematics, Philosophy, Auto Technology, etc.—as the instructional units that undergo review. By spring, 2007, it is

anticipated that all instructional disciplines will have completed program review under this model, and a second cycle—perhaps more campus/college-based—will begin.

Each February, a series of workshops are held for instructors representing the 10 – 15 disciplines beginning the program review process that year. The process itself is explained in detail, with particular emphasis on the use of institutional research data being made available to each discipline. As noted earlier, outcomes assessment is also a central component of program review. A core question in the program review template asks "how does your discipline intend to assess student learning outcomes?" The workshops include an intensive introduction to all aspects of outcomes assessment, particularly the writing and measuring of SLOs for individual courses.

A suggested general strategy for an initial student outcomes assessment plan was, until 2006, as follows:

1. If program level outcomes are defined, provide a listing of these.
2. Select a course and plan to clarify learning objectives for that course. If program level outcomes were provided in #1 above, choose a course that addresses one or more of these program level outcomes.
3. Describe plans to explore means of assessing students' attainment of learning objectives.
4. Plan to develop an initial approach to assessment for the course and apply the approach. Working within the discipline to develop common assessment methods for a course may be a useful approach.
5. Develop a timeline for #2, #3, and #4 above.
6. Discuss how the discipline may later expand the assessment to other courses, course sequences, or generalized program level outcomes (e.g., students will demonstrate effective writing skills).

A number of RCCD disciplines have employed these guidelines to do meaningful assessment of learning in specific courses, and many of these disciplines continue to assess learning without the immediate stimulus of program review. (See, for example, sample assessment reports in English, Mathematics, CIS, Chemistry, Life Sciences available at the DAC website.)

Beginning in 2006, DAC decided to modify the outcomes assessment requirements for program review slightly, in part to clarify and make more specific its expectations. As part of program review, all disciplines are now expected to complete the following five tasks:

1. Update all course outlines of record (CORs), which now ask for student learning outcomes and for teaching and evaluation methods tied to those outcomes.
2. Do an assessment audit or inventory of work already being done by the discipline involving the collaborative observation and measurement of student learning. (DAC came to understand that a great deal of outcomes assessment was already taking place in disciplines throughout the institution, though not typically called assessment. The assessment audit is meant in part to reassure disciplines that outcomes assessment is really only a more systematic effort to do what they are likely to have already done, to a greater or lesser extent, anyway.)

3. Complete a matrix for each course meeting (or potentially meeting) general education requirements to align SLOs for the course with RCCD general education outcomes whenever possible. (See Appendix X.)
4. Complete a course-focused assessment cycle and report on results.
5. Provide a timeline that indicates what assessment work the discipline intends to engage in next.

Annual program review updates are also now required of all disciplines, partly as a way of ensuring that outcomes assessment has become an ongoing activity.

DAC expects to modify the assessment guidelines further for the cohort beginning a second round of program review in 2007. At that point, we anticipate that all CORs will have been updated, and all disciplines will have completed at least one cycle of course-based assessment. We will probably encourage occupational education disciplines to focus on program-level assessment at that point, while requiring academic disciplines to concentrate on assessing general education outcomes in courses that meet general education requirements. The program review process continues to undergo modification, both to simplify its requirements and to link its results more rigorously to strategic planning and resource allocation in general.

V. Assessing General Education Outcomes

As noted earlier, DAC decided to begin assessment activities at RCCD modestly, at the level of classes and courses, because it worried that institution-level outcomes would be difficult to assess. It noted what it perceived as a common failing among many community colleges that began by taking a more "top-down" approach to assessment: institutional outcomes or core competencies were often well defined and publicized, but practical methods for assessing those competencies (and using results to improve teaching and learning) were usually embryonic at best. From its inception, DAC agreed that it was an <u>assessment</u> committee, not simply an "SLO" committee. It acknowledged the importance of developing learning outcomes for all units of instruction, but it wanted to move as quickly as possible into the second and third stages of the assessment cycle—measuring learning and using results to improve learning. Its initial focus on course-based assessment has enabled it to do that.

In recent years, however, DAC has aggressively turned its attention to institution-level outcomes, with particular focus on general education. In 2004, a number of DAC members and RCCD administrators attended a conference at which they were encouraged to work as a team to develop a preliminary list of institutional core competencies, in light of the new accreditation standards for general education. The work of identifying general education SLOs continued throughout the 2004-5 academic year, with all members of the institution solicited for input through the many presentations and workshops the DAC co-chairs made on this topic. The three Academic Senates have supported this work and been kept apprised of its evolution. Student involvement in this process has also been encouraged (the campus-based Student Senates, for example, were involved in the development of the gen ed SLO statement). By the end of 2006, DAC has developed a tentative list of core learning competencies it associates with general education at RCCD and which it intends to seek Board of Trustees approval for:

**RCCD General Education Student Learning Outcomes
for Academic and Vocational Degree Programs**

1. **Critical Thinking** (including problem-solving, argumentation, evaluation of rival hypotheses, generalizing appropriately, identification of assumptions and biases)
2. **Information Skills** (including computer literacy and effective location and use of information)
3. **Communication Skills** (including the ability to write, read, listen, and speak effectively)
4. **Breadth of Knowledge** (including the understanding of the basic content and modes of inquiry of the major knowledge fields, the use of the symbols and vocabulary of mathematics, the ability to respond to and evaluate artistic expression)
5. **Application of Knowledge** (including life-long learning, the ability to set goals for personal and professional development, the ability to transfer academic and technical skills to the workplace)
6. **Global Awareness** (including the demonstration of teamwork skills, understanding of diversity and of alternate viewpoints, appreciation for civic responsibility)

RCCD has begun to assess these outcomes in a number of ways:

1. **Student Surveys.** The CCSEQ was administered in spring 2004 and spring 2006, and an in-house survey of RCCD graduates was developed and administered in spring 2006. Although these are indirect measures of student learning, a great deal of recent evidence suggests that students are usually reliable indicators of their own learning gains when asked about them. The surveys suggest to us that RCCD students think they are leaving the institution with substantial learning gains in almost all of the areas we expect them to, with more than 80% of graduates indicating that they had experienced moderate or significant gains in 20 of the 25 learning areas our questionnaire targeted. In two areas, 90% or more students reported moderate or significant gains: "writing with precision and clarity to express complex thought," and "being a life-long learner." Only one outcome had a student-reported gain of less than 70% in the moderate or significant category, "responding to and evaluating artistic expression." Since there is at present no general education requirement for art, music, or literature (the selection of courses that may be used to satisfy the humanities breadth requirement includes many courses, like those in foreign languages, where this competency cannot be expected to be achieved), the survey has had the effect of confirming for us what we already expected was the case. But we will also have to consider why our students are not, in sufficient numbers,

reporting gains in computer literacy (perhaps they come to the institution already highly literate in computer use), mathematics, and transferring skills to the workplace. A fuller report on the results of this survey may be found in the appendix.

2. **Alignment of Courses Meeting General Education Requirements with the Gen Ed SLOs**. As noted earlier, RCCD is beginning to assess the gen ed outcomes by focusing on the assessment of courses meeting gen ed requirements. Disciplines whose courses meet (or could potentially meet) gen ed requirements are being asked to align course SLOs with gen ed SLOs whenever feasible, and to provide evidence that students taking those courses achieve those learning outcomes. It also became apparent to DAC during the initial stages of this effort that the RCCD general education requirements themselves needed thorough review, both because this review had not taken place in some 20 years and because it seemed important to consider realignment of the requirements to match the new gen ed outcomes. Like most California community colleges, RCCD introduces students to a breadth of study ("through which," according to the catalogue, "people comprehend the modern world") via a minimum of 23 semester units taken from a selection of courses in the Natural Sciences (3 units), the Social and Behavioral Sciences (6 units), the Humanities (3 units), and Language and Rationality (10 units).   In order to review these requirements and make recommendations for change, DAC suggested to the District Academic Senate that a committee on general education be formed. The committee consists of over 20 instructors from all the major knowledge fields, from occupational education disciplines as well as the traditional gen ed disciplines, and from all three campuses. It is chaired by the president of the Riverside Academic Senate. It hopes to complete its work and issue a report, with recommendations, by spring 2007. Eventually, we anticipate that the general education requirements at RCCD will change, perhaps substantially, to ensure that all students achieve the gen ed core competencies no matter what specific path they take through the required courses. Minimally, this work will exercise some salutary pressure on disciplines to link the SLOs of their courses more explicitly to broader institution-level SLOs.

3. **Direct Assessment of Student Artifacts**. DAC recognizes the need to do more direct forms of learning assessment in the area of general education. It has considered, and so far rejected, standardized testing as a way of assessing such broad learning outcomes as writing competency, critical thinking, etc. Beginning in 2006, however, it intends to focus more directly on student products in general education classes, perhaps by developing a kind of eportfolio system that assessment theorists like Trudy Banta have advocated and which a

number of colleges and universities (most of them east of the Rockies) have successfully employed. (We are particularly interested in a model used for many years by Johnson County Community College, though Johnson County examines student artifacts in hard copy, not electronically.) We may decide to focus on one of our six gen ed competencies in each successive year and begin by asking instructors in the courses most often taken to satisfy general education requirements (e.g., Political Science 1, English 1A, etc.) to provide us with anonymous samples of work done by students late in the semester to be read against a rubric. A goal for the 2006-7 academic year is likely to be to the development of a pilot project involving direct assessment of student work for evidence RCCD is enabling them to achieve its stated learning outcomes for general education.

4. **Data Analysis.** Some gen ed outcomes are probably best assessed indirectly, through more careful analysis of data already being compiled (or able to be compiled) through our office of institutional research. Besides working more closely with that office to better use existing data for assessment purposes, we want to consider enrolling in one or both of the two national benchmarking projects developed at Johnson County Community College by its director of institutional research, Jeffrey Seybert, a leading authority on assessment in community colleges. These projects will require us to assemble and provide a great deal of data, but it will potentially enable us to get even more information in return—information that can help us see how well we are doing in comparison to other similar institutions, information that can help us see more clearly where we can improve instruction and student support.

VI. Discipline-Based Assessment Efforts

At present, RCCD comprises some 50 disciplines, of which 15 have completed program review using the current guidelines that require the development of an assessment plan (at least five more should finish by the end of 2006). Perhaps not surprisingly, some disciplines have been more responsive to this requirement than others, and others have only begun to develop their assessment plans because they have only recently begun program review. DAC continues to work with all disciplines—even the most recalcitrant—in an effort to encourage them to do regular course- or program-based assessment. To an idealist, the assessment landscape at RCCD is sometimes cause for concern; to a realist, it is a source of some pride. DAC counsels realism to its members and to the institution as a whole (as well as to readers of this report).

It's useful to describe disciplinary assessment efforts at RCCD using a kind of rubric, with a realistic goal each year the expectation that each discipline will move up at least one level on the scale.

Stage 5: **The discipline has developed and implemented a plan to assess learning in its courses and/or programs. Assessment data for multiple courses or programs have been generated and used to improve teaching and learning in the discipline. Assessment is a consistent and ongoing feature of the discipline's culture.** Auto Technology, Construction, Cosmetology, Counseling, Dental Hygiene, English, ESL, Library, Mathematics, Philosophy, Reading

Stage 4: **The discipline has developed a plan to assess learning in its courses and/or programs and begun to implement it. Assessment results for at least one course or program have been generated and used to improve teaching and learning in the discipline.** Chemistry, Certified Nursing Assistant, CIS, Early Childhood Studies, EMS, Human Services, Life Sciences, Medical Assisting, Nursing, Physicians Assistant, World Languages

Stage 3: **The discipline has developed a plan to assess learning in its courses and/or programs and begun to implement it. Assessment results for at least one course or program have been generated, though they have not yet been used to improve teaching and learning.** Business Administration, Humanities, Music

Stage 2: **The discipline has developed a plan to assess learning in one or more of its courses or programs. It has not yet implemented the plan; no assessment results have been generated or used as yet to improve teaching and learning.** Anthropology, Certified Nursing Assistant, Dance, Dental Technology, Economics, Engineering/Manufacturing, History, Geography, Physical Education, Political Science, Speech Communication, Telecommunications

Stage 1: **The discipline has discussed outcomes assessment but has not yet developed a plan to assess learning in its courses, nor has it generated or used assessment data**. Administration of Justice, Community Interpretation, Psychology, Photography, Theatre

Stage 0: **The discipline has not responded to requests to provide DAC with information about its assessment activities. Or it has done so by saying that discussion of discipline-based assessment has yet to take place.** Air Conditioning, Art, Culinary Arts, Fire Technology, Graphics Technology, Journalism, Sociology, Welding

Thus, over three-fourths of RCCD's disciplines have an assessment plan in place, and most of those disciplines have begun to implement their plans. Nearly a quarter of the disciplines have fully operational assessment plans, generating data that has been used for improvement in student learning—among them such foundational disciplines as Math, English, and Reading. The great majority of disciplines at Stage 0 in this process only

began program review in February 2006, and so are likely to move up at least a stage or two in the coming academic year.

VII. Outcomes Assessment and Student Services

Although RCCD's student service areas have participated in an annual program review process for the past few years, the incorporation of SLOs was a new concept in the 05-06 school year. To facilitate this new charge, service area leaders were invited to bring three of their staff members to participate in a two-day planning retreat in the spring 2005. The first day of this retreat was devoted to acquiring knowledge, understanding and practice of writing SLOs. Initially the whole group was given a brief overview of SLOs and SAOs by the Associate Vice Chancellor, Student Services, with the Matriculation program review being used as an example. The next step was to break up into program areas and, using provided checklists, develop an outline for a program review which included SLOs, SAOs. The second day, the group had the opportunity to investigate the various assessment methods available to them for evaluating their SAOs and SLOs. They then divided back into their service area groups and wrote assessment plans for their outcomes.

The group then discussed the due dates for the four phases of the program review process: (1) development of the program review incorporating the SLOs; (2) implementation of interventions to address these SLOs; (3) implementation of the assessment process to evaluate the effect of the interventions on the SLOs; and (4) utilization of these results to make informed decisions and improve programs and services. The final activity in which the groups participated was the development of a timeline and delineation of staff responsible for the four segments of their service area program reviews.

Over the past year, these four phases were implemented. The program areas were charged with completing the initial program reviews by summer 2005, and the final version was completed by fall 2005. Throughout fall, winter and spring terms, activities and interventions were implemented to bring about the desired outcomes. During spring 2006, program areas began the process of evaluating the SLOs and SAOs. Student Services is currently in the final phase and is utilizing assessment information to make appropriate changes to improve programs and services. This information is also guiding both the program review process and the budget allocation process for the 06-07 year.

VIII.   Outcomes Assessment and Mathematics

In 2000-2001, as part of a Pew Grant for Course Redesign and Title III Grant, the RCCD mathematics discipline redesigned its Elementary Algebra as a student-centered course incorporating new teaching strategies, technology, and tutoring to promote active, student-centered, individual and group learning. The discipline refined the Elementary Algebra student learning outcomes and developed a comprehensive course-based assessment project. The assessment project focused on three areas: 1) student learning, 2) student attitudes and perceptions, and 3) faculty perceptions. The principle process of assessing student learning was to compare traditional and redesigned course outcomes. Three learning areas were assessed: 1) elementary algebra performance, 2) enrollment

and performance in subsequent mathematics courses, and 3) gains in knowledge and skills. The assessment team chose to use common final exam results rather than course grades since, prior to the redesign course standardization, grades were not based on common measures. The common final was first used in fall 2000 when all elementary algebra sections were taught in a traditional manner, was utilized throughout the grant period when sections were taught in the redesigned format only, and continues to be used with a variety of course types. Peter Ewell, a well-known assessment expert, commended the final assessment report for the Pew Grant project. Even after the grant period ended in 2003, the assessment project continues with a total of six years of data at the time of this writing.

IX   4Faculty.Org

4faculty.org, a web-based series of training modules for community college faculty develop in and maintained by the RCCD Office of Faculty Affairs, provides instructors with advice on creation of student learning outcomes, assessment methodologies, and teaching techniques to improve student learning. The Quick Start Guide, a resource largely targeted at part-time faculty, helps them to understand their learners, plan for their course, build their syllabi and assessment methods, make a good first impression, and prepare vital records. The Quick Start Guide is designed as a three-hour training module in the hope of ensuring that even last minute hires are familiar with the importance of student learning outcomes and assessment for our students.

Other modules address these issues in more detail. The faculty co-chair of DAC revised the 4faculty module focusing on assessment to enhance and expand upon materials prepared in the past. This revision guides faculty more clearly through the process of assessment and offers links to numerous examples. 4faculty added a module on Student Learning Outcomes in fall of 2005. That module edited by faculty from the Moreno Valley campus and our Associate Vice Chancellor helps faculty see the link between the creation of SLOs and assessment. The most widely read module in 4faculty is about syllabi creation. This module also guides faculty through as step by step process including: identifying the purpose of the course, how to develop learner centered SLOs, structure a course, build lessons, develop a calendar and add support pieces.

X.   Title V

In 2003, RCCD was granted three separate Title V (Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions) grants for each of the campuses in the district. The purpose of these grants was to improve student success for low income, high risk and Hispanic students through innovative interventions involving instruction, student services, and/or learning support services. It was funded over a five-year period with the objective of initiating institutional change through data-supported evidence of success by targeted students involved in the various Title V interventions. Once the grant is completed, it is up to the various campuses (becoming colleges in 2008) to institutionalize those interventions showing the best outcomes. Among the interventions implemented were: learning communities, fast track (accelerated) English courses, summer math intervention

programs, modularized courses, supplemental instruction, and technology-enhanced instruction.

One of Title V's major contributions to assessment was in its funding of Outcomes Assessment Specialist (OAS) positions at each of the campuses. In addition to providing data support to all of the interventions, the OAS job description identifies a key function as "assisting disciplines with the development, collection, analysis, and interpretation of student learning outcomes data." Through the years, Title V assessment activities have included: active participation in the District Assessment Committee (DAC), presentations to faculty and facilitated discussions on student learning outcomes, attendance at various assessment conferences, helping in the creation of the general education outcomes list, individual work with faculty in developing surveys related to SLOs, and consultation on research design and institutional effectiveness issues including benchmarking for the first time in the district.

XI.   Conclusion: Challenges and Goals

RCCD has had considerable success in its effort to develop an institutional culture of assessment, despite some challenges common to all California community colleges and others unique to it. Assessment has been called an unfunded mandate; certainly all of us in California are struggling to do meaningful outcomes assessment in a budget climate that is not particularly hospitable to innovative programs, professional development, and other forms of necessary support. Assessment must be a faculty-driven process, but community college faculty who have demanding classroom responsibilities, accreditation and strategic planning committee work, and hiring and mentoring duties do not always greet the invitation to develop and implement outcomes assessment plans with open arms. (Like many other California community colleges, RCCD has a number of disciplines with only a single full-time instructor, and all of our disciplines depend heavily on adjunct instructors—features that make collaborative outcomes assessment among the faculty who teach in particular disciplines difficult to achieve.) Outcomes assessment at four-year colleges and universities tends to focus exclusively on degree patterns and majors, a significantly less onerous task for faculty than the course-based assessment our accrediting agency asks of us. RCCD's task has been even more challenging. It has had to develop and implement assessment at the same time it has been planning its conversion from a three-campus college to a three-college district. As noted elsewhere in this document, RCCD organizational structure (multidisciplinary departments with individual academic disciplines loosely organized across the three campuses) is not particularly conducive to effective course-based assessment efforts. DAC itself has had to maintain momentum and continuity in recent years despite turnover in the positions of Associate Vice Chancellor for Institutional Effectiveness and District Assessment Coordinator. In light of these challenges, it is remarkable that we have made so much progress, that we have become, at least to some extent, a model for other California community colleges in how to "do assessment."

With our accreditation self-study requiring completion during the 2006-2007 academic year, RCCD is unlikely to institute any bold new initiatives in outcomes assessment. Our focus is likely to be more modest, consolidating gains we have already

made and preparing for future activities that might have to wait until 2007-2008 for implementation. To sum up our likely goals, then, we expect to

1. Continue to expect course- or program-based assessment from disciplines undergoing program review, as well as updates on assessment activities from disciplines between program review cycles. We will work to assist disciplines to move up at least one level in their development and implementation of assessment plans.

2. Extend assessment efforts further to encompass more of the district student support services and other non-instructional areas.

3. Work toward generating more meaningful institution-level assessment data and using that data to improve teaching and learning. RCCD will investigate the feasibility of joining the national benchmarking projects in an effort to get comparative data for institutional improvement.

4. Continue our effort to assess general education outcomes. RCCD trustees will be asked to approve gen ed SLOs, which will continue to be widely publicized. Our general education taskforce will work toward ensuring that courses meeting gen ed requirements have assessed SLOs that align with the broader RCCD gen ed learning outcomes. Gen ed requirements themselves will be reevaluated and likely modified. DAC will begin to assess gen ed outcomes directly through the examination of student artifacts and perhaps through the development of eportfolios.