

Home Alone but Working as a Team: Virtual Collaboration for Student Learning

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Abstract

The Student Learning Steering Committee at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas, oversees the assessment of student learning within instructional programs and student support areas. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee met in-person on a monthly basis. This article reports how the Committee continued its work virtually during these unprecedented times. Lessons learned from the Committee's virtual collaboration are shared.

Home Alone but Working as a Team: Virtual Collaboration for Student Learning Student Learning Steering Committee at Del Mar College

The Student Learning Steering Committee at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas, oversees the assessment of student learning within instructional programs and student support areas. The Committee strives to ensure that students are gaining the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be successful in their chosen careers or future learning experiences. The Committee reviews assessment processes, examines data, and makes recommendations for improvement of student learning within the following key areas: instructional programs, general education, and academic and student services (co-curricular activities).

Meetings involve more than twenty faculty and staff members, including leaders from the Office of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, instructional deans and department chairpersons, faculty from general education and career education courses, and staff from student support offices such as Student Leadership and Campus Life, Outreach and Enrollment, and Student Engagement and Retention. The first author is the Associate Vice President of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, and the second author is the Program Director of the American Sign Language and Interpreting Program and Faculty Coordinator of Assessment. They both serve as leaders of the Committee. The third author is a Research Associate in the Office of Institutional Research and a member of the Committee.

Committee Meetings During the Pandemic

It was essential for the Committee to continue its work during these unprecedented times. Significant progress had recently been made in implementing a new college-wide model for general education assessment using student artifacts. Not only was there interest in keeping the momentum of recent activities going, but the College was also in the middle of its Reaffirmation of Accreditation activities required by its regional accreditor, SACSCOC.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee met in-person on a monthly basis. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, the Del Mar College extended its spring break, which was originally scheduled from March 9 to March 14, 2020, for an additional week. Subsequently, the Del Mar College moved classroom instruction and the majority of its operations online. Following a brief hiatus in March, the Student Learning Steering Committee re-launched its activities virtually using Microsoft (MS) Teams to facilitate continued engagement, discussions, and decision-making.

Within MS Teams, Committee leaders created discussion channels on priority topics. Materials were posted for review by the Committee along with questions to guide responses and analysis. Instructions

for utilizing Teams were provided via email and committee members were asked to respond to the discussion prompts by a set deadline. The online discussions allowed for efficient decision-making when the Committee subsequently met virtually using the Microsoft Teams videoconference feature. Participants reviewed the main points of the discussions before arriving at final conclusions and next steps. Since April, the Committee has conducted virtual meetings on a monthly basis.

Tasks Accomplished During the Pandemic

During the April to July time period, the Committee completed many assessment tasks related to the College's general education core objectives. For instance, the Committee provided feedback on revising rubrics for Critical Thinking, Empirical and Quantitative Skills, and Written Communication. After using MS Teams for general discussion, two of the rubrics were then approved by the full Committee, while work continues on the third. Rubrics will be available to faculty to revise or design assignments to be used for college-wide assessment of the objectives.

The Committee reviewed college-wide results of previously conducted assessment of another objective, Teamwork, and provided recommendations to improve student outcomes of this objective. The Committee also developed plans for an online rating session for Personal Responsibility artifacts provided by different general education courses to determine student outcomes on this objective. In addition to general education related tasks, the Committee worked on a variety of tasks, including providing feedback on the proposed changes in the annual assessment cycle and program student learning outcomes requirements.

Lessons Learned

In working with the Committee to accomplish so much during the pandemic, the authors learned several important lessons:

- Regular and on-going communication is key—the leaders sent emails about upcoming meetings that included copies of reports and proposals, the Committee had monthly videoconferences, and the leaders used discussion boards in our software to gather feedback between meetings.
- Provide members with ample time to review proposals before decisions need to be made—as mentioned, proposals attached to emails and/or placed in discussion boards allowed members to see the discussion topics prior to large group meetings.
- Provide an open and welcoming group culture – while the Committee was able to see each other during face-to-face meetings, it was harder when technology limited the number of people we could see or when some did not have video turned on. The leaders did their best to say “hello” or welcome each member during videoconferences.
- Work in smaller groups for specific tasks—asking members who had a direct interest in and expertise to work on specific proposals allowed that smaller group to have proposals ready for the larger group
- Discussion boards work! The leaders gave the Committee detailed instructions on how to use the discussion boards and set expectations for their participation by developing guiding analysis questions, then provided summaries of the discussions for the large group meetings. While some committee members may not have been comfortable using the technology, with the efforts the leaders made to provide directions and then allow members multiple ways to review information, the Student Learning Steering Committee was able to focus on and complete multiple major assessment tasks during the pandemic.

About the Authors

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