



# Using a Faculty-Created Transformational Assessment Paradigm for General Education: Faculty Learning Communities

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## OVERVIEW

Developing a general education that is both appropriate for a liberally educated student and can be meaningfully assessed by the institution is no small task. Faculty at Texas Christian University have created a Core Curriculum through a broad-based, participatory process. Each category within the Core Curriculum is based on a competency and associated outcomes. Faculty members who are teaching a course in any particular category are members of a Faculty Learning Community whose role is to create assessment measures for the specified outcomes and to use the resulting data to enhance teaching and learning. This case study focuses on Theme 3 (Institutional Strategies for Assessment) and Theme 2 (Great Designs for Assessment). The process is designed to give ongoing and formative feedback to the faculty as well as summative feedback in the form of program review every six years.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE CLASS, MODULE OR PROGRAMME

The TCU Core Curriculum ([www.core.tcu.edu](http://www.core.tcu.edu)) has three components: the Essential Competencies Curriculum (12 hours plus 6 hours Writing Emphasis), the Human Experiences and Endeavors Curriculum (27 hours), and the Heritage, Mission, Vision, and Values Curriculum (18 hours which may overlay with other elements of a student's degree requirements). The required minimum hours are 39 (12 EC + 27 HEE), with an additional 6 hours of writing emphasis plus a substantial overlay component (18 HMVV) which can be provided by coupling overlay outcomes with the HEE Curriculum or with the major, minor, or general curriculum.

The assessment process for the TCU Core Curriculum involves a variety of methods. Specifically, the Heritage, Mission, Vision, and Values Curriculum (HMVV) has a Faculty Learning Community (FLC) for each of the six categories. Each FLC is led by two faculty facilitators whose role is to bring faculty teaching courses in that category together to design assessment tools, gather data, and discuss the results of the data to enhance teaching and learning. These FLCs are funded by the Office of the TCU Core Curriculum, the Office for Assessment and Quality Enhancement, and the Center for Teaching Excellence.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE

Faculty at TCU have developed and implemented an undergraduate core curriculum. The initiative to revise the undergraduate core was a direct outcome of an institutional strategic planning process in 2000 known as *The Commission on the Future of TCU*. The resulting curricular reform process was guided by three overarching goals:

1. Faculty, in a broadly participatory process, must design the TCU Core Curriculum.
2. The TCU Core Curriculum must embody the mission of the University.
3. The TCU Core Curriculum must be explicitly designed to incorporate student-learning outcomes.

This process of curricular reform has been extraordinarily rewarding on several levels. TCU faculty from across disciplines and colleges have engaged in a level of dialogue that is unprecedented on our campus. Additionally, staff in the academic and student affairs



divisions were deeply involved in the process, particularly during the implementation phase. As a result, TCU now has an innovative undergraduate core curriculum that is expressed in outcome statements of student learning congruent with our institutional mission.

The most innovative feature of the TCU Core Curriculum is what we have termed the 'overlay' curriculum. Courses in this curriculum cultivate the broader skills and awareness associated with TCU's distinctive Heritage, Mission, Vision, and Values (HMOV). TCU's Heritage is explored via the study of Religious Traditions, Historical Traditions, and Literary Traditions. Similarly, TCU's Mission, Vision and Values are explored via courses that focus on Cultural Awareness, Global Awareness, and Citizenship and Social Values. By design, these HMOV categories are not bound to any particular discipline or department. By opening each category to a range of disciplinary perspectives, faculty and students can engage in pedagogical innovation and conversation across traditional disciplinary boundaries.

The HMOV curriculum is termed an overlay in that courses that satisfy a particular HMOV category may also be used to meet course requirements in the essential competencies of mathematical reasoning, written and oral communication or in the traditional core curricular categories of humanities, fine arts, social sciences and natural sciences.

Central to this innovative HMOV curriculum that transcends traditional program boundaries was the interdisciplinary collaboration necessary to construct student-learning outcomes that were consistent with the TCU ethos and of the highest academic integrity. This interdisciplinary collaboration has been extended into the course 'vetting' processes not only in the HMOV overlay portion of the TCU Core Curriculum, but also in the curricular areas where course approval oversight is managed by traditional colleges or departments.

Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) were created for each of the six categories for the HMOV section of the Core (<http://www.hmvv.tcu.edu/FLCs.asp>). Each FLC is led by two faculty facilitators. The facilitators charge is to bring members of the FLC together on a regular basis in order develop assessment tools for the category outcomes, gather the data, and then use the data to enhance teaching and learning.

At this point, the assessment tools have been created for three of the categories (Religious Traditions, Historical Traditions, and Cultural Awareness). Each is using a very different assessment tool, however, each tool is specifically designed to gather data that the faculty teaching in the category want in order to made pedagogical decisions.

A calendar has been established that provides for a modified program review of each HMOV category every six years. Then, on the seventh year, the entire HMOV program will be reviewed.

#### **RATIONALE IN TERMS OF EDUCATIONAL IDEAS**

The importance of using assessment tools that were designed by the faculty who will be using the data cannot be understated. This is essential to the success of this type of assessment. Thus, the following principles have guided the ongoing process:

1. Student learning outcomes must be established as an integral part of the curriculum.
2. The Faculty must initially create the student learning outcomes that are part of the Core Curriculum.
3. Individual faculty members must understand and use the student learning outcomes as any specific course is designed or submitted to be included in the Core Curriculum.
4. All faculty members who are teaching a course in the area should be invited to be part of the discussion of assessment and teaching.
5. Each Faculty Learning Community has the right and the responsibility to create assessment tools that measure the outcomes for that category.



6. Assessment tools may be qualitative or quantitative.
7. The institution recognizes that it will take time to create and then to pilot test the newly developed assessment tools.

## EVALUATION

The outcomes for this process are:

- Faculty from each category of the Core Curriculum will develop assessment tools that fully assess student learning for each outcome that is specified.
- Each assessment tool will be pilot tested before it is used with the entire student population taking any course within any specific category.
- Following the administration of each assessment tool, data will be shared with all faculty teaching in that specific category.
- Data will be used to enhance the discussions on pedagogy.
- Modifications in teaching will be outlined each year for each category.



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