The 2000-01 Student Learning Outcomes Report

General Education Program

Executive Summary

Rio Salado General Education learning outcomes highlights for 2000-2001 are as follows:

- Students scored within the acceptable range of college-level performance on the writing, reading, problem solving, and information literacy. Critical Thinking average scores were at the lower end of the college-level range. Ninety-two percent of the students taking the Reading Competency assessment scored at college level or above.[1] On the Information Literacy assessment, 97 percent of the respondents scored at or above college level, as did those who took the Problem Solving assessment, 91 percent on the Motivation portion and 89 percent on the Metacognition portion.

- The Academic Profile was administered to 357 Rio Salado students as a multiple measure. Rio Salado students had a higher mean than the appropriate national two-year public college mean on all sections of the test. When these mean scores are referenced to percentiles, the Rio graduate cohort scored at the 94th percentile when compared to 2-year public sophomores nationally. Further, the distance learning and dual enrollment cohorts scored at the 100th percentile when compared to other 2-year public freshman nationally. The dual enrollment cohort also scored at the 100th percentile on each individual tested subject.

Therefore, in 2000-2001, Rio Salado General Education students demonstrated college-level skills on each of the five General Education competencies. Students performed at a higher level than comparable students nationwide on the AP. Although assessment results are not always conclusive, the use of multiple competency assessments make it possible to identify both strengths and potential problem areas for Rio Salado students.

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[1] College level performance is defined as 2.75 and above on the Rio 4-point assessment rubric.

Assessment Process

During the 2000-2001 academic year at Rio Salado College, competency assessments were administered to students in order to measure student skill levels in writing, reading, problem solving, critical thinking, and information literacy across the curriculum. Annual averages were computed using the scores from all students who completed an assessment during the academic year.

Each competency assessment instrument was connected to a four-point rubric for that competency. All rubrics were based on the General Education program competency assessment rubric defined as: 1 = unacceptable at the college level, 2 = minimally acceptable at the college level, 3 = skills expected at the college level and 4 = superior college level skills.[2] In general, students scored within the acceptable range of college-level performance on all competencies for most semesters.

A number of changes have been made in the assessment process in the pursuit of continuous improvement at Rio Salado College during 2000-2001. Prior to this academic year, assessments were administered throughout the year. However, as of 2000-2001, assessments are now administered only during the spring semester. This is an effort to encourage more participation by only asking students to participate once per year. Further, it allows an emphasis on using the results for interventions to improve teaching and learning, as opposed to focusing on data gathering and analysis.

The assessment process has been streamlined in other ways. Competency assessments were previously delivered in paper format to each student in selected courses. The students were required to fill out the paper assessment and return it by mail. The introduction of the Institutional Research Data Base (IRDB) has greatly changed this process. With the introduction of the IRDB, assessments can be placed directly into the line-up of lessons in on-line classes. The assessment responses are sent directly to the database for analysis by the Institutional Research Office staff. In addition, students in mixed media, print-based, and in-person classes who receive scannable versions of the assessments also have the opportunity to enter their responses on-line into the IRDB. Further, this system has allowed the Institutional Researcher to improve the program level assessment design by using a much more precise stratified sampling distribution process. The results of the research are, therefore, much more generalizable to the Rio Salado student body.

In addition to streamlining the process of assessments, Rio Salado has also refined several of the assessment instruments. Over the past three years the Reading instrument was pared down from three instruments to one instrument in order to create a more comparable response set. The Critical Thinking and Problem Solving assessments have been replaced with new instruments, and an Information Literacy instrument has been developed and tested. The Writing instrument has been refined such that the holistic writing score will still be given, however, five categories of skills that define the writing process will also be graded.

Other nationally norm-referenced examinations were used as multiple measures to allow the study of student skills from several perspectives on the same or similar skills. The nationally normed Academic Profile (AP) from the Educational Testing Service has been used beginning with the 2000-2001 academic year. The AP assesses college-level writing, college-level reading, critical thinking, humanities, social science, natural sciences and math. From 1998-2000, the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) was used. It tests writing, reading, critical thinking, mathematics, and scientific reasoning.