Chapter 7

Student Learning

Overview

Lancaster Bible College (LBC) has made considerable strides in the assessment of student learning since our last self-study. The process for the creation, review, and adoption of syllabi has been strengthened by the vertical academic structure and the work of department chairs, the Office for Teaching Effectiveness, and the Office of Digital Learning. All course assignments are mapped to course student learning outcomes (SLOs) on the syllabi, reinforcing the connection between content and assessment. The completion of what we call assessment annotations provides documentation of course-level student learning that can be used to drive change. With the implementation of Taskstream, our planning and assessment database, assessment data is captured and analyzed in an accessible and practical format. Furthermore, LBC graduates are finding employment or attending graduate school, which indicates LBC has prepared them to live a biblical worldview and to proclaim Christ by serving Him in the church and society. Our challenge, and on what most of our research questions for this chapter focus, is how to continue the process of incorporating these structures into programs and venues which were fairly new or non-existent during our last self-study. These programs include blended pedagogies, seminary/graduate programs, non-traditional accelerated degree programs, digital learning, and additional locations.

Standards

MSCHE Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution's students have knowledge,

skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.

A reading of this chapter will also lend support to our compliance with MSCHE Standard 7.

MSCHE Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment plan and process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

Compliance Documented

In keeping with a comprehensive report with a focus on key issues, the reader is directed to our Documentation Roadmap showing evidence of our compliance with all appropriate fundamental elements of Standard 14. Primary documentation of evidence at the programmatic level can be found in LBC's assessment and planning database where each academic program has a workspace which includes curriculum maps, programmatic student learning outcomes, evidences of the accomplishment of these outcomes, analysis of the evidences, and action plans based on the analysis of the evidences. (See Social Work and Education [Appendices 7A and 7B] examples). The accomplishment of higher level outcomes can be found in the Arts & Sciences (Appendix 7C), BA in Biblical Studies (Appendix 7D), and the Institutional Effectiveness (Appendix 7E) workspaces. Just one example of how we track the accomplishment of our five Core Knowledge & Skills (CKS) is found in the 2015-2016 Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Cycle. There a measurement of CKSs notes that over the past five years, 398 assessment annotations have been submitted which have tracked the accomplishment of our CKS #2, demonstrating critical thinking skills, through a variety course-embedded assessments in courses all across the curriculum, via multiple modalities and locations.

The remainder of this chapter includes additional evidences of compliance within the framework of the key issues we have chosen to focus on in this study.

Research Questions

"The primary purpose of the self-study report is to advance institutional self-understanding and self-improvement" (*Self-Study: Creating a Useful Process and Report, 2006*, p. 4). With that purpose in mind, the following research questions guided the study group in preparing this section:

1. To what degree are we ensuring quality development and consistency of student learning outcomes and competencies in all programs, locations, and modalities that are consistent with our goals?

2. How effective are we at consistently assessing student learning at all locations, through all delivery methods and at all levels by connecting student learning to broader institutional goals?

3. How effective are we at meeting the learning needs of individual students across all levels, locations, and modalities?

4. To what degree do our graduates have the necessary knowledge and skills for their future job and/or additional education?

Analysis of Key Issues

During our 2007 Self-Study process, the evaluation team made a recommendation that we "expand current direct assessment to include some nationally-normed tests (such as Academic Profile, MAPP, or CLA) and/or more course-embedded assessments using rubrics designed by the department to assess student success." This recommendation was accepted, and details of the steps taken over the following years are recorded in our 2012 Periodic Review Report (Appendix 1D).

Acknowledged in that report is the reality that direct assessment would be an ongoing endeavor. This section highlights additional steps taken over the past five years to further develop direct assessment and to incorporate it into newer programs and venues.

The Foundations of Student Learning

In response to LBC's rapid growth and expansion, the college moved to a new [vertical academic structure](#) (Appendix 6B). Academic departments now oversee programs at all levels within their discipline, instead of the adult and graduate programs being administered separately. As can be seen in this chapter and in Chapter Four: Academic Programs, this move provides a much better structure by which to "foster a coherent student learning experience and to promote synthesis of learning" at the certificate, associate, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral levels (*Characteristics of Excellence*, 2006, p. 43).

The move to a new academic structure also provided the opportunity to take a fresh look at a refinement of course descriptions and to assess whether each program has in place "clearly articulated statements of expected learning outcomes" (*Characteristics of Excellence*, 2006, p. 66). As the Academic Council meeting minutes reflect, all syllabi are brought to the council after being approved by academic departments. The appropriate faculty members, program coordinators, and department chairs at the undergraduate and graduate level are part of the adoption process. Additionally, many faculty meet one-on-one with the Office for Teaching Effectiveness to review course syllabi, outcomes, and assessments. Some graduate faculty have met with the Office of Digital Learning for a similar purpose. With the acquisition of additional programs and locations, departments are reviewing and approving new-to-LBC syllabi in order to standardize syllabi across all locations and programs.

In addition, programs are also going through similar revision in an effort to strengthen learning and assessment. As the Academic Council meeting minutes reflect, in preparation for vertical integration, the following programs revised their respective program-level outcomes to some degree: Arts & Sciences, Intercultural Studies, Business Administration, Early Childhood Education, Middle Level Education, Music Education, and Health & Physical Education. Courses are mapped to program-level outcomes and program-level outcomes are mapped to Core Knowledge & Skills.

In conjunction with the vertical integration, during an October 2015 faculty focus group, several faculty members noted that syllabi from the two Center for Urban Theological Studies (CUTS) sites were not academically up to standard. Since these concerns relate to faculty at additional locations, this issue will be addressed in Chapter 9: Standard 13 - Related Educational Activities – Contractual Relationships & Affiliated Providers.

For maximum curricular effectiveness, course design and student learning assessment must be coupled with faculty attuned to student learning needs. It is noted on the 2015 Faculty Survey (Appendix 7F) that over 50% of professors surveyed reported that they know well or know fairly well the learning needs of the students in their classrooms. Additionally, over 50% responded that they were well or very well equipped at meeting the learning needs of their students. A 2015 Student Survey (Appendix 7G) indicated that the majority of LBC undergraduate students think their instructors meet these needs well. As discussed in Chapter 4, Educational Offerings, students' perceptions of academic rigor provide another measure of effectiveness in meeting learning needs.

Use and Efficacy of Blended Learning

LBC's use of blended courses, combining online learning with face-to-face classroom time, has increased dramatically in the past few years. Both students and instructors have embraced this modality. Several important studies affirm the blended format is at least as effective as classroom-only instruction, and some indicate it may be even more successful. Evidence from a recent study conducted by the US Department of Education found the blended format continues to improve. According to Marshall Smith, senior counselor to the secretary of education,

> Studies of earlier generations of distance and online learning courses have concluded that they are usually as effective as classroom-based instruction. The studies of more recent online instruction included in this meta-analysis found that, on average, online learning, at the post-secondary level, is not just as good as but more effective than conventional face-to-face instruction (from [Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning](#)).

In addition to positive student learning experiences, blended courses have been shown to produce "increased course completion rates, improved retention, better student attitudes toward the subject matter, and increased student satisfaction with the mode of instruction compared to traditional formats" (from Appendix 7I: [Blended Learning: Uncovering its Transformative Potential in Higher Education](#)). Additional articles regarding the effectiveness of blended courses include [Is Blended Learning the Best of Both Worlds?](#) (Appendix 7J) and [Blended Learning Is Better than Instructor-led or Online Learning Alone](#) (Appendix 7K).

Assessment Measures

LBC has been recognized for our accomplishments in assessment of student learning outcomes. In Banta and Palomba's *Assessment Essentials* (2nd edition, 2015), LBC was noted for our multiple

layers of assessments (p. 21), for a faculty workshop focused on creating course-embedded assessment (p. 44), and for our annual new faculty orientation which includes three sessions on assessing student learning (p. 52). All three *Assessment Essentials* references were drawn from articles written by our Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and originally published in separate editions of *Assessment Update*.

As indicated by several measures including the 2015 Faculty Survey (Appendix 1I), 2015 Student Survey (Appendix 1K) and syllabi review, professors are using a wide variety of assessment measures in their classrooms, representing a "systematic, sustained, and thorough use of multiple . . . measures" with the goal of documenting "direct evidence of student learning" (*Characteristics of Excellence*, 2006, p. 66). According to the faculty survey, the most frequently used types of assessments are discussion/forum, in-class activity, and papers; all three being direct measurements, although the first two are acknowledged as informal assessments.

In addition, the faculty survey revealed that for more formal assessments like papers, presentations, projects, and field experiences, rubrics were used to evaluate how well the students met each aspect of the learning outcome. Most instructors felt comfortable with their ability to develop and use rubrics (Appendix 7L). This level of confidence can be traced back to our Office for Teaching Effectiveness's efforts to assist our faculty in this area by providing workshops (Appendix 7M) recorded for future viewing.

According to the faculty survey, measurements used included both formative and summative assessments. Approximately 40% of faculty surveyed are giving pre-assessments and/or daily/lesson/unit assessments. In other words, faculty are using a variety of assessments, and seemingly doing so before instruction, as well as frequently during instruction. Similarly, the

responses on the student survey confirm a variety of assessment measures are being used. However, the students noted that a variance exists in the most frequently used types among courses in the Arts & Sciences, courses in Bible & Theology, and courses in the major programs. The varied assessment measures corresponded appropriately to the type of class. For example, major program-related courses used presentations and field experiences as assessment measures which arguably are better suited for these types of courses, while Bible & Theology instructors used more tests and quizzes to assess the knowledge-intensive courses and other types of assessments when it came to application of that knowledge.

Chart 7.1

Faculty Survey: What types of assessment measures do you use? Please indicate how often you use this measure.
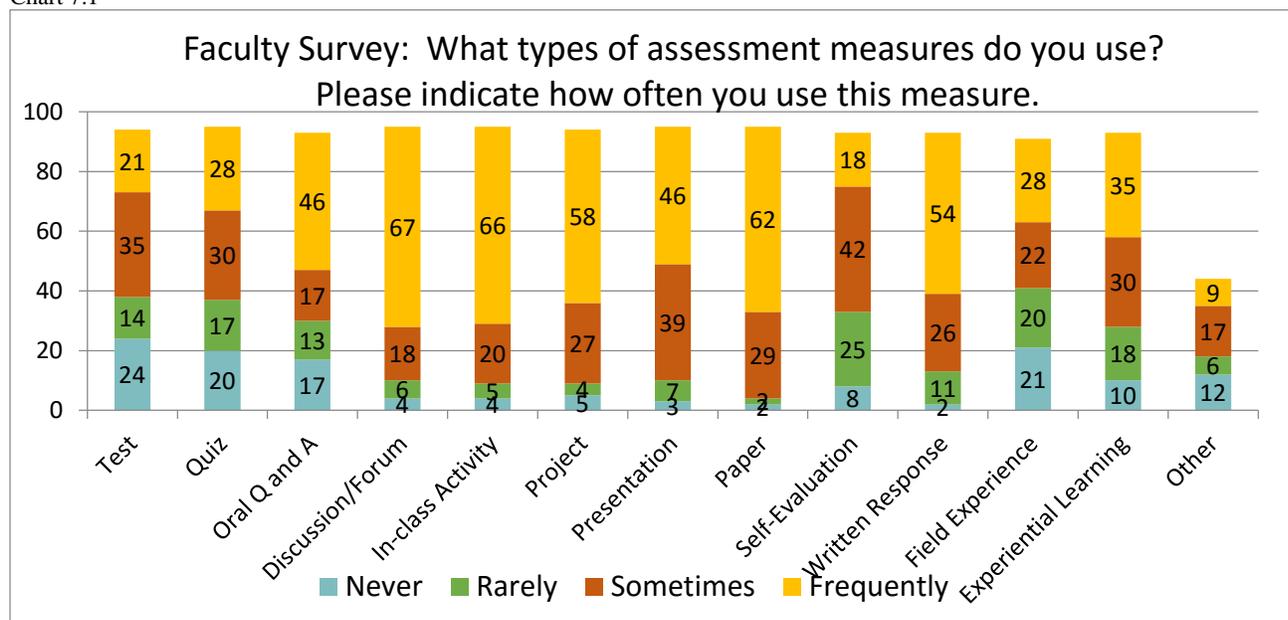
Assessment that Drives Change

Though varied assessment and the use of rubrics are strengths to be noted, LBC recognizes that merely using an assessment measure does not guarantee a commitment to adjust instruction. Therefore, LBC has adopted several measures to promote the use of assessment data to drive change. One of those measures is assessment annotations. The Assessment Annotation (Appendix

6H) is a tool faculty use to document some (not all) of the assessment activities taking place in the classroom. It ties a course-embedded assessment activity to the course outcome measured. The form also allows the instructor to link any programmatic or institutional level outcomes the activity may be at least partially measuring. Faculty use the form (Appendix 7N) to analyze the results of the activity, and to record any intended actions they will take that may enhance the current or future accomplishment of associated learning outcomes. The Assessment Annotation can be used as either a formative or summative assessment, or both.

When taken as a whole, both at the programmatic and institutional levels, Assessment Annotations are one indicator that provides evidence that "assessment results . . . provide sufficient, convincing evidence that students are achieving key institutional and program learning outcomes" (*Characteristics of Excellence*, 2006, p. 67). Over the course of the four and a half years since Assessment Annotations were first initiated until the time of this writing, instructors have completed over 600 Assessment Annotations. Annotations have been submitted from traditional undergraduate courses, accelerated undergraduate courses, and graduate courses from three locations, as well as from online courses. The overwhelming majority of these annotations come from traditional undergraduate courses, with the highest percentages coming from instructors in Bible & Theology (16% or 88 submitted) and the Arts & Sciences (11% or 60 submitted). The three highest major programs were Education (9%), Health & Physical Education (8%), and Social Work (7%).

While we are thrilled with the current use of these annotations to document course-embedded assessment, there is still work to be done on using assessment for appropriate change. In reviewing Assessment Annotations from 2014-2015, some gave a thorough analysis of learning while others were vague. Also, more instructors in graduate courses need to use Assessment Annotations to

document learning and address issues for further change. Fewer than 50 graduate-level Assessment Annotations have been submitted since 2011, with 15 of them from the Professional Counseling programs. LBC is actively seeking to improve the quality of Assessment Annotations. Our Faculty Coach and the Office of Digital Learning developed a 2015 professional development session (Appendix 7O) to address this.

As was noted in the Compliance Documented section of this chapter and as seen in our Documentation Roadmap, while we promote the use of the Assessment Annotation as a valuable tool in documenting the assessment of student learning, it is just one of many tools being used for this purpose.

Documenting the Loop Process

Another tool that documents student learning and drives change is Taskstream, the planning and assessment database. During our 2007 Self-Study process, a recommendation was made by the evaluation team that LBC "follow its self-study recommendation to simplify and focus on the assessment process and continue to implement assessment plans and review assessment data. As data becomes available, it should be used to modify and improve teaching, curricula, and courses to better achieve learning outcomes. Each department or unit could designate two to three outcomes to assess in each cycle, with both direct and indirect forms of assessment." This recommendation was accepted and, as noted in our 2012 Periodic Review Report (Appendix 1D), over the next few years LBC tried following these recommendations using in-house means. However, it soon became apparent that contracting with an outside source would be more efficient and effective. Therefore, starting in the 2013-2014 school year, LBC began using Taskstream for our planning and assessment tracking. Taskstream allows LBC to document the six Transparency Framework Components (Appendix 7P) of assessment as outlined by The National Institute for

Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA). Each academic program, academic support unit, and student support unit has a planning and assessment workspace. Taskstream can be used to document each of the Transparency Framework Components as shown in the following table. Documentation of campus-wide outcomes can be found in the Office for Institutional Effectiveness workspace (Appendix 7Q), with documentation of programmatic outcomes in each individual program's workspace.

Table 7.1

Transparency Framework Components in Taskstream	
Transparency Framework Component	Documentation Found in This Workspace Section
Student Learning Outcomes Statements	Standing Requirements: Unit Objectives/Outcomes
Assessment Plans	Standing and Annual Assessment Plans
Assessment Resources	Standing and Annual Assessment Plan: Outcomes & Measures
Current Assessment Activities	Annual Assessment Cycles
Evidence of Student Learning	Annual Assessment Cycles
Use of Student Learning Evidence	Assessment Findings: Reflections, Recommendations Action Plans Status Reports

Taskstream also provides the opportunity to map curriculum to programmatic outcomes, map programmatic outcomes to higher level outcomes including accreditation standards, and store additional documents, to name the major features currently used. LBC has also added a space for conducting an Annual Assessment Review (Appendix 7R) that shows each program's "periodic evaluation of the effectiveness and comprehensiveness of the institution's [and programmatic] student learning assessment processes" (*Characteristics of Excellence*, 2006, p. 67). The use of Taskstream planning and assessment database provides LBC with "sufficient simplicity, practicality, detail, and ownership [for our assessment documentation] to be sustainable" (*Characteristics of Excellence*, 2006, p. 66).

While there remains more work to be done, undergraduate program coordinators have entered program goals and mapped them to our Core Knowledge and Skills. Program coordinators at the undergraduate level are using the site to document student achievement of programmatic outcomes. Relevant Assessment Annotations are being loaded into the workspaces as evidence associated with specific programmatic outcomes. The Social Work program's site (Appendix 7A) is the most comprehensive in its content, providing a variety of assessment measures, findings, and recommendations. The Social Work program found Taskstream essential to achieve accreditation by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). The Early Childhood Education program (Appendix 7B) is also well-documented in Taskstream. While many other programs have the basics populated into their Taskstream workspaces, this accountability tool can be used even more effectively in the future. Programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels need to build their program information and systematically collect data that indicates student learning. Because Taskstream has powerful mapping features, it can be a tool employed to drive curricular change.

Assessment of Core Curriculum

In addition to our general education curriculum discussed in Chapter 5, LBC has a second core, our Bible & Theology (B&T) curriculum. Our academic programs and degrees integrate content from the Bible, theology, and the arts and sciences across every professional area of study. We believe this integrated approach is the best means to fulfill our mission to "educate Christian students to learn and live according to a biblical worldview, and to equip them to proclaim Christ by serving in the Church and society." Therefore, each certificate and degree earned at LBC includes a core set of Bible & Theology courses, with 4-year traditional undergraduates taking a minimum of 33 credits in Bible & Theology. The learning outcomes for our Bible & Theology core are:

Students will:

1. Articulate a basic knowledge of Scripture and theology

2. Apply a valid hermeneutical method of research skills in biblical interpretation

3. Demonstrate an exegetically sound, biblically informed, historically and culturally sensitive theological method

4. Appraise differing biblical, theological, cultural, and historical views

5. Formulate a biblical worldview demonstrated in life and ministry

6. Exhibit sensitivity to the global community in biblical and theological dialogue

7. Display a commitment to grow scripturally and theologically

Throughout our 83-year history, biblical integration has always been at the core of our undergraduate curriculum. Nevertheless, we are continually looking for ways to improve our students' understanding of how the Word of God informs every aspect of our lives as Christ-followers. During the 2014-2015 academic year, the Bible & Theology Department examined our curriculum through the lens of intentional biblical integration. The result of that work is a refined curricular scope and sequence. Redundancies have been eliminated and a proper foundation providing a rich theological and biblical context has been built into the first-year student experience. Most importantly, instead of having an array of open Bible electives, the Bible & Theology Department will begin creating courses in partnership with other academic departments to intentionally help students learn how the Word of God informs their particular field of study. For example, students in our Social Work program will study a theology of suffering. Students in the Business Administration program will study a theology of work. Students in our Pastoral Ministry program will explore proper biblical stewardship. It is our desire that our students in every academic context will develop a deeper understanding of what it means to "think and live a biblical worldview." So while we maintain a required minimum of 42 Bible & Theology credits

for all graduates, nine of these are now focused within the chosen professional area. Two exceptions were made for our heavy credit-bearing majors (Education and Worship & Performing Arts). Students in those programs will demonstrate biblical integration throughout professional core courses. Approvals of this new approach involved the Bible & Theology Department, the Academic Council, and the President's Leadership Team. First-year program-focused Bible & Theology courses will be rolled out in the 2016-2017 academic year.

This new integrated approach to our Bible & Theology core curriculum calls for adjustments to tracking the accomplishments of our Bible & Theology outcomes. These outcomes can no longer be tracked exclusively through Bible & Theology courses. New measurements must be adopted for tracking to occur in Arts & Sciences courses and major programs courses. The assessment annotations noted earlier are one major means by which these outcomes can be documented across the curriculum. The form allows instructors in any course to *selectively* tie their course-embedded assessment to Bible & Theology core outcomes, if appropriate. Additional means of assessing Bible & Theology core outcomes in non-Bible & Theology courses will need to be developed.

Some current assessment measures may still be used with some modifications. LBC has developed our own Bible Knowledge Assessment exams. In use for many years, they document student learning in the area of Bible and theology knowledge and skills. This assessment tool consists of a pre- and post-assessment. A February 2014 Bible Knowledge Assessment (Appendix 7S) report indicates, on average, students score 10 to 14 points better on the post-test than the pre-test, demonstrating they have gained Bible knowledge while students at LBC (see average scores on Chart 7.2 below). However, the post-test scores have fallen since 2010, which is a cause for concern (see Chart 7.3 below).

While this tool has been useful in the past, with the current vertical re-structuring and the move away from one central capstone course for all students in favor of individual program capstone projects, a decision needs to be made as to how to include a post-assessment for students or if this pre/post assessment strategy should be eliminated. The Academic Council will need to address how best to assess the accomplishment of our core Bible & Theology core outcomes, especially in light of the recent initiation of program-based Bible & Theology core electives.
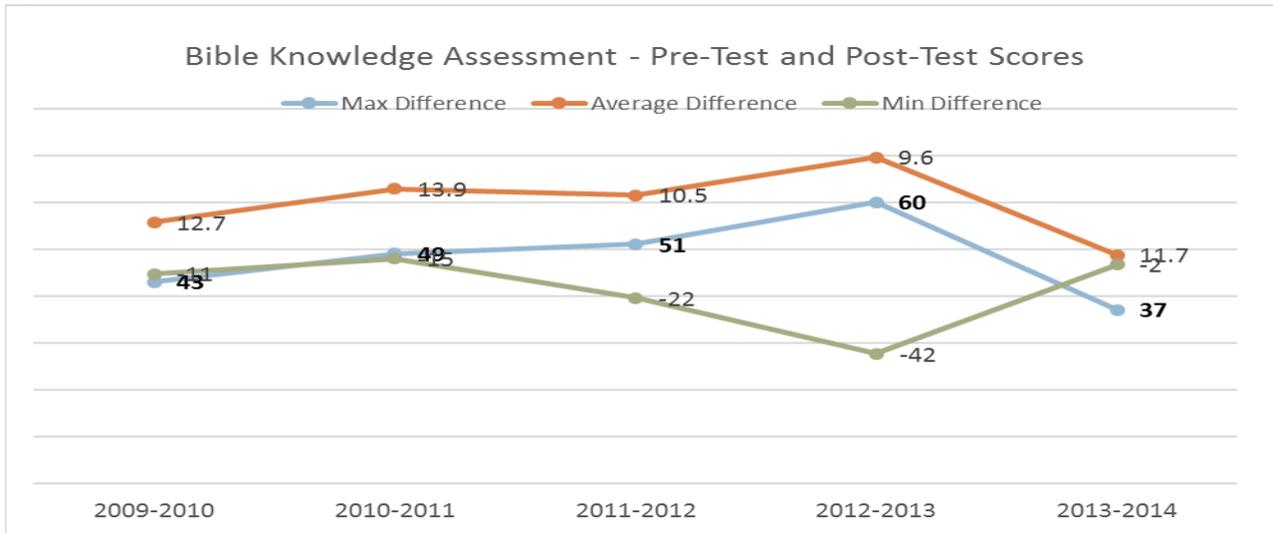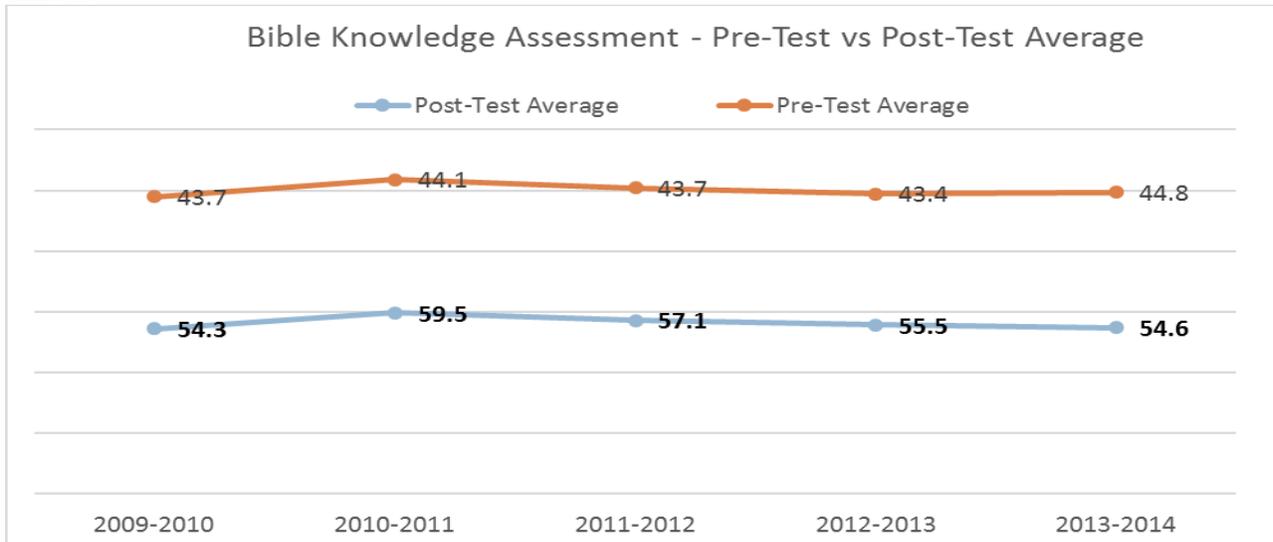
Chart 7.2

Chart 7.3

Post-Graduation Assessment

While student learning outcomes at the course and program levels and assessment are important, the most critical outcome, and an additional measure of academic rigor is students' success after graduation. An indicator of student learning is their ability to find employment and/or enter post-graduate education. As reported on the College Affordability and Transparency Center's College Scorecard, LBC's graduate rate is 71%, well above the national average of 43%. The income of our graduates is proximal to the national average; despite the fact many of our graduates go into lower-paying ministry and social services professions. Only 4.3% of our graduates default on their loans, well below the national average of 13.7%. These figures indicate LBC graduates are finding employment sufficient to repay student loans. However, there is more to LBC accomplishing its mission than graduates finding employment and satisfying student loans. We need to determine if our graduates are entering positions related to their field of study.

In review of the 2016 Alumni Survey (Appendix 1M), 40% of the respondents reported current employment in their field of study, with an additional 13% employed in the field of their minor (84 alumni took the survey, with 63 responding to this question). These numbers compare quite favorably to the 27.3% nationally who indicated they are employed in a job related to their college major (as reported in a May 20, 2013 article in the Washington Post based upon 2010 Census Bureau data).[1] Another 13% of alumni are currently enrolled in graduate school, with 10% studying within their discipline. Of the alumni respondents, 42% had attended or are attending graduate school. Ninety-five percent of these alumni answered "No" when asked if they had to

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[1] Plumer, Brad. "Only 27 percent of college grads have a job related to their major." Washington Post. N.p., 20 May 2013. Web. 9 Dec. 2016.

complete any additional undergraduate courses to gain full admission to their graduate program. Alumni reported that LBC did a very good or good job of preparation for their current position (81%), citing training in biblical study and critical thinking as particularly helpful.

As of this report, only two programs track post-graduation placements. The Social Work program notes that over the past 5 years, 88% of its graduates have obtained employment in their field of study or were pursuing graduate education. The Education department reports that over the past five years, 75% of its graduates are employed in their field of study upon graduation. One notable accomplishment for the Education Department is a 2010 alumna named the Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year in December 2015. More effort needs to be invested in tracking graduates from all departments, online, and graduate students.

Summary

Even with its rapid growth and expansion over the past few years, LBC has systems and procedures in place to maintain and improve student learning. The standardization of syllabi and mapping of assessments to student learning outcomes lay the foundation for learning. Taskstream and Assessment Annotations provide avenues to capture course and program student learning to further promote change and growth. High rates of employment and pursuit of graduate education indicate faculty knowledge of student needs and academic rigor are fostering alumni success.

Key Strengths Noted in This Section

1. An operational student assessment infrastructure has been developed and implemented.
2. The standardization of syllabi, mapping, and approval process has been strengthened.

Suggestions

1. The Academic Council should actively seek to improve the quality of assessment annotations.

2. More work should be done to more effectively utilize Taskstream, our planning and assessment database.

3. The Academic Council should address how best to assess the accomplishment of our core Bible & Theology outcomes, especially in light of the recent initiation of program-based Bible & Theology electives.

4. Better means of tracking post-graduation placement should be incorporated.

Recommendation for Growth and Improvement

This study group is making the following recommendation for consideration:

1. To extend the gathering and evaluation of assessment data to all departments and at all levels (undergraduate/graduate, course/program).