

Narrative

1. Leadership:

Middlesex Community College (MCC) nominates Catherine Pride, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology. Recommended by Provost and Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Philip Sisson, and Dean of Assessment, Elise Martin, Pride is a highly respected faculty leader who has served as a campus, state, and national representative for MCC in assignment design, assessment and transfer. Pride served as MCC's Faculty Fellow in AAC&U's Quality Collaboratives (QC) project and is currently a statewide Disciplinary Sector Leader for the Massachusetts Transfer Pathways Project (MATPP), working to align expectations for student learning in high-transfer programs within the state's public higher education system. MATPP offers a strong network for adoption and replicability for important curricular initiatives such as STIRS. Pride participated in NILOA's first Assignment Charrette, contributing to the development of a national library of high-quality, peer-reviewed assignments linked to Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP) outcomes. She teaches the capstone Research Methods course in MCC's Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) Psychology Concentration. In that course, students produce signature work, the outcomes for which are scaffolded to provide vertical alignment with signature work required at the baccalaureate level at our primary transfer university, University of Massachusetts Lowell (UML). Pride was a plenary panelist at AAC&U's 2015 GenEd & Assessment Conference, speaking about institutional strategies that foster scaffolded, integrative approaches to student signature work.

Historically, MCC has engaged in numerous AAC&U opportunities and initiatives, generating pilot projects for which we have leveraged additional funding sources to integrate, scale and sustain the work. Our Core Commitments work became the fabric of our Bridging Cultures work, which has informed our use of the DQP and VALUE rubrics as framework for scaffolded Social Responsibility, Intercultural Competence and Global Learning outcomes as represented in students' signature work often showcased in student ePortfolios (funded by both Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (MA DHE) Vision Project and AAC&U Roadmap Project). This MA DHE Vision Project work, utilizing the DQP and VALUE rubrics formatively and summatively, grew out of our AAC&U QC Project work. Martin is also a member of the AAC&U GEMS Design Working Group. College leadership and past practice will ensure that the STIRS initiative, led by Pride, is embedded into our existing framework of interconnected institutional initiatives, driven by our strategic goals.

2. Context:

In 2010, catalyzed by AAC&U's Developing a Community College Roadmap project and the intent to provide a better scaffolded, more integrative GenEd curriculum, MCC launched a First Year Experience (FYE) course as an early element of our GenEd revision work. The FYE is now a one-credit GenEd seminar that can be linked with other introductory college-level courses to form FYE Learning Communities, and/or bundled with any of several other 1-credit GenEd courses to build a GenEd elective. One of these courses is the Undergraduate Research Seminar, which is offered across the GenEd curriculum. Research design protocols differ by discipline, but the scaffolded development of problem-based research skills is common to all research courses.

In 2011, MCC's Faculty Staff Association voted to revise our GenEd curriculum to more directly and integratively support student achievement of MCC's six Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (ISLOs). Over three years, MCC moved from a distribution, inputs-based model of infusing content into designated courses to an integrative, outcomes-based model in which students' competency with ISLOs is intentionally developed and assessed throughout the GenEd curriculum. We continue to

build and support a culture of student ePortfolio use, with a goal that all students represent and reflect on their development of essential skills, abilities and habits of mind as a result of their GenEd, co-curricular and degree program experiences.

As a community college that prepares many students for transfer to four-year institutions, MCC maintains a constant focus on the vertical alignment of our curricula and learning outcomes with transfer partners. We have collaborated extensively with UML for this purpose. In 2012, our MCC-UML collaboration in AAC&U's QC Project inspired our innovative MA DHE Vision Project-funded initiative, "Expanding the Faculty Toolkit". This project allowed us to scale up the number of faculty and disciplines for development of program-based, scaffolded learning outcomes anchored with students' signature work. Pride has served as Faculty Fellow in each of these initiatives, working with faculty from both institutions to backwards design from Baccalaureate degree disciplinary expectations the development of signature assignments that reflect students' increasing fluency with complex, contextualized essential learning outcomes. In each case, Baccalaureate expectations have included students' ability to apply evidence-based problem-solving approaches to frame problems in the field, generate evidence-based strategies for addressing these problems, and evaluate possible outcomes. What our collaborative work has helped to facilitate at both the community college and university is students' scaffolded development of those skills as they progress towards Capstone work in the degree, represented by their signature work in Cornerstone and Connector courses typically taken by students in their freshmen and sophomore years.

3. Goals:

Within MCC's LAS Psychology Concentration, Dr. Pride will lead work to develop a library of faculty-developed, peer-reviewed Cornerstone and Connector (Milestone) assignments designed to generate students' signature work representing their ability to use evidence to solve problems and make decisions, at scaffolded levels of complexity, for progress to Capstone work at the Baccalaureate level. This project aligns tightly with the Concentration's primary student learning outcome: "Students will move from relying on 'common sense' or biased patterns of thought to an ability to 'make sense' of observations, problem-solving to effectively use the scientific method and critical-thinking approaches for these same purposes", which was developed in alignment with [APA's Guidelines for the Undergraduate Psychology Major](#). The development of this assignment library will be informed by:

- STIRS Framework for the development of Scientific Thinking and Integrative Reasoning skills, contextualized to MCC's LAS Psychology Concentration;
- Pride's MATPP work to identify common expectations (and associated outcomes) for common courses within Psychology transfer degree programs;
- Pride's Faculty Fellow experience leading the QC Project (and subsequent state-funded projects) in the backwards design of scaffolded cumulative assignments that intentionally build student competency with contextualized Essential Learning Outcomes;
- Alignment of MCC's Psychology Concentration program-level outcomes with MATPP-developed outcomes;
- Course mapping within the Concentration to determine appropriate Cornerstone and Connector signature work touch points;
- MCC's annual Spring Assessment Day, at which students' signature work generated in these Cornerstone and Connector courses will be assessed by Psychology Concentration faculty as well as the GenEd Assessment Team. This assessment data will provide us multiple perspectives from which to determine the degree to which students' ability to use evidence to solve problems and make decisions increases in complexity during progress towards degree. Using

our assignment design faculty development model, we will follow this assessment work with opportunities for faculty to collaborate, using peer feedback, to improve assignments generating students' signature work.

Longer-term goals include scaling this work to other programs, beginning with those that also offer significant numbers of GenEd courses, in order to impact the greatest number of students as quickly as possible. The STIRS focus on scientific thinking and integrative reasoning skills is a representation of MCC's Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving ISLO, and as such, is relevant within and across GenEd and all disciplinary programs.

4. Needs:

Our greatest challenge lies in scaling up opportunities for thoughtful assignment design collaborative work for our full (133) and part-time (439) faculty, both within and across disciplines. We have used AAC&U, Lumina and Massachusetts DHE funding to build and extend successful models of collaborative assignment design work for small groups of MCC faculty. Access to the learning community and exemplars offered through the STIRS initiative will support efforts to generate additional creative ideas around sustainable faculty engagement in signature work efforts. Price looks forward to gaining a deeper understanding of scaffolded signature work across transfer programs beyond Massachusetts. These perspectives can be used to strengthen MCC's GenEd curriculum and transfer articulation agreements, strongly enhancing student learning.