



# Application Packet

Higher Learning Commission's Assessment Academy

## Application Process Overview

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This packet provides the materials needed for institutions applying to HLC's Assessment Academy. Institutions should complete this application process when participation in the Academy serves as its Open Pathway Quality Initiative, as an AQIP Pathway Action Project, or for its own purposes. The Academy Review process will replace the Quality Initiative Review process for institutions using their participation as a Quality Initiative.

### Eligibility

The Assessment Academy is open to all institutions accredited by HLC. The curriculum is designed to benefit all institutions, from community colleges to large universities. Institutions at all stages of the improvement process are encouraged to apply.

### Application Submission

Submissions should include a completed Application, the Institutional Contact form and the Application Affirmation form. Any submissions with missing items will not be considered.

The entire submission should be sent to [academy@hlcommission.org](mailto:academy@hlcommission.org) in PDF format by the appropriate deadline listed below. Paper applications will not be accepted.

### Application Deadlines:

Fall 2015 Cohort: June 12, 2015

Spring 2016 Cohort: November 25, 2015

*Note:* Open Pathway institutions choosing to use Academy participation as the Quality Initiative must begin participation between Years 3 and 7 of the Open Pathway cycle.

### Selection Process

All applications are reviewed by each member of the Admissions Panel: the institution's HLC staff liaison, two external reviewers and the Director of the Academies.

When reviewing applications, the Admissions Panel focuses on:

1. The types of institutions applying for the each entry date and their availability.
2. Time constraints based on the identified purpose for participation (Academy as Quality Initiative or Action Project).
3. The application submission date (space is filled on a first-come, first-served basis).

The Admissions Panel may accept the institution into the Academy for the preferred point of entry dates, accept the institution into the Academy for a different point of entry date, deny the institution admission into the Academy or request the institution resubmit the application if it is incomplete.

## Criteria for Selection to the Academy

Institutions applying for the Academy are selected based on the following criteria:

### Evidence of Need and Benefit

- Need prompted by current opportunities, challenges or barriers in relation to assessment of student learning.
- Need prompted by institutional goals or strategic priorities.
- Benefit by integrating institutional goals or strategic priorities with accreditation efforts.
- Other needs that can be met through Academy participation.

### Commitment and Focus

- Clear and succinct statements of needs and goals.
- Reasonable and realistic goals appropriate to the institution's history and to participation in the Academy.
- Expectations, commitment level and desired results appropriate to the purposes and intent of the Academy.
- Senior leadership commitment to genuine effort and participation for the full cycle of the Academy.
- Assurance that key individuals and groups will be involved to maximize the benefits of the Academy.
- Assurance of effective team membership for Academy activities (Chief Academic Officer and appropriate cross-representation of faculty, administrators and others from across the institution as appropriate; students may be involved).

### Potential Impact

- Clear expectations for what can be gained via the Academy, particularly the anticipated impact on assessment of student learning.
- Evidence that Academy participation is significant and challenging to the institution and should result in broad, meaningful impact on the assessment of student learning.

### Cohort Mix

- Balance of institutional types making up the cohort entering the Academy.
- Cross-section or mix of institutions that best promotes inter-institutional learning.

## Letter of Agreement

An institution selected to join the Academy will be asked to sign a Letter of Agreement accepting the terms of the Academy within 30 days. This letter outlines the institution's commitments to the Academy and HLC's commitments to the institution. The letter also addresses any expectations pertaining to the institution's accrediting relationship with HLC. If changes in the accreditation relationship occur during the institution's Academy participation, the Letter of Agreement will be amended to reflect those changes.

Please contact [academy@hlcommission.org](mailto:academy@hlcommission.org) with any questions.

**Institution:** Bismarck State College  
**Application Date:** August 17, 2015

**City, State:** Bismarck, North Dakota

## Cohort Preference

Please identify Cohort start dates in order of preference:

1 <sup>st</sup> Fall 2015	September 2, 2015	Information & Planning Workshop
	October 14-16 2015	Roundtable
2 <sup>nd</sup> Spring 2016	March 29, 2016	Information & Planning Workshop
	June 8-10, 2016	Roundtable

*Note:* HLC determines the institution's cohort based on the selection process.

## Cohort Groups

Institutions are admitted to the Academy in cohorts of 10-12 institutions. Institutions may indicate interest in participation based on the student group on which the Academy Project focuses or indicate interest in collaboratively working with one or more institutions on shared issues. While efforts will be made to group cohorts accordingly, applying in conjunction with one or more institutions does not guarantee admission to the Academy or placement in the same cohort.

Please indicate any special considerations or requests for cohort placement, with an explanation supporting the request:

## Purpose for Academy Participation

An institution in the Open Pathway may use the Academy as its Quality Initiative. To do so, the institution must begin participation between Years 3 and 7 of the Open Pathway Cycle.

Institutions in the AQIP Pathway may use the Academy as an Action Project. Institutions may also choose to participate in the Academy for institution-specific purposes, and not as a part of the accreditation process.

Purpose for Application:

- Open Pathway Quality Initiative
- AQIP Pathway Action Project
- Other institutional purposes (please specify):

## Application Questions

The institution should provide responses to the following questions. The application should be no more than 14 pages.

## Recent Efforts

1. What is the institution's "assessment story?" Evaluate the institution's past and present efforts (include things such as accomplishments, issues, barriers, results and strategies).

Bismarck State College's assessment journey is one that is not unfamiliar to other institutions and HLC Assessment Academy leadership. Assessment efforts and progress have ebbed and flowed over time, and while accomplishments have been made, the institution recognizes that we have yet to develop and successfully implement an effective, sustainable, and comprehensive assessment program. Assessment is not a new initiative at BSC, but rather has some history attached to it. Assessment has been conducted on an informal and formal level for some time. The Assessment Committee has been in existence since at least 2000.

Responsibility for assessment has fallen under various positions on campus over time, with the eventual creation of a position solely dedicated to assessment efforts. The creation of the position stemmed from the feedback in the 2009 Systems Appraisal that noted BSC had work to be done to improve our assessment program. This feedback, along with BSC leadership recognizing the need to formalize assessment efforts, led to the hiring of an Institutional Assessment Coordinator in the summer of 2012.

One of the strongest aspects of the assessment program at BSC lies in the intent and rationale for implementing and continuing such efforts. Student learning and success is at the core of our institution, with assessment emerging as a way to promote, improve, and support student learning and success. Assessment at BSC has continually focused on the need to ensure that students who come to our institution and are awarded degrees and certificates have met our learning and development expectations. While student learning has long been a part of BSC, the current commitment to assessment of student learning is even more notable. The BSC 2013-18 Strategic Plan explicitly identifies assessment as a priority of the goal to ensure high quality education. More specifically, an objective exists to develop and implement systematic approaches to measure, assess, document, and communicate student learning outcomes.

One of the primary issues facing BSC, though, is that our focus on student learning and success has not translated into a campus-wide embracement of assessment. During the tenure of the assessment program, BSC has engaged in multiple iterations of assessment plans that have left faculty and staff confused about our processes, procedures, and outcomes. Faculty perceive assessment as inconsistent, confusing, and complex due to the repeated changes and lack of accountability that have been tied to assessment efforts. This in turn has led to greater resistance and negative opinions about academic assessment. Staff, on the other hand, have never been brought into assessment efforts and do not view themselves or their work at the institution as a piece of the puzzle. To engage in the next step and shift the culture of assessment at our institution, past experience and barriers will need to be overcome. Acquiring faculty buy-in, which would require changing the prevailing point of view of assessment as an add-on piece separate from faculty members' regular duties, is one obstacle to address. The lack of BSC administrative directive for faculty accountability will also need to be addressed in order to successfully move our assessment efforts forward. Lastly, expanding assessment to administrative departments on campus may require additional resources. While not an obstacle, it will require institutional planning and commitment.

Rather than shrinking from these barriers and obstacles, BSC has recently done the opposite. In late spring 2013, a faculty assessment survey was conducted to discover faculty views of assessment and their opinions of the effectiveness of BSC's assessment program. Results from this survey were shared with various constituents across campus, including the Dean of Academic Affairs, department chairs (with the request for them to share the results with faculty in their departments/programs), and the Assessment Committee. These results and other changes in the campus context, such as employee changes and undertaking program prioritization, have sparked more open, honest conversations about the status and future of assessment around campus. Additionally, the work of the Assessment Committee has recently

shifted. Institutional essential learning outcomes (IELOs) have been developed, and work is now being done on structuring the institutional level of assessment and connecting it back to program level outcomes and course level outcomes. AQIP action projects have been initiated that have set some of the groundwork for moving assessment efforts forward, but have been limited in scope. One of BSC's current AQIP action projects, entitled "Reinvigorating Academic Assessment," will provide an initial step to developing a comprehensive approach to institutional assessment; however, it still has a narrow focus on academic assessment only. This AQIP action project, though, will serve as a useful complement to participation in the Assessment Academy and presents BSC with a unique opportunity to build a robust and sustainable assessment framework that encompasses the whole institution.

In reflecting on the institution's past and present efforts, it is clear that BSC is poised to take the next step in the development of our assessment program. We have an opportunity to redefine and restructure the assessment program into an institution-wide effort involving both academic programs/departments and administrative departments. Beyond that, we can take this opportunity to seamlessly fuse curricular and co-curricular assessment together. BSC's commitment to improving student learning and providing a quality experience for students supports the potential that is present for our institution. However, we have admittedly not been able to achieve this on our own and are in need of guidance - such as guidance from the Assessment Academy - to help us in these efforts.

## Scope and Significance

### 2. What are the institution's most pressing needs that are to be addressed via participation?

While there are many needs surrounding assessment that BSC would like to address, perhaps the most pressing and challenging at this time is extending assessment to include both curricular and co-curricular activities. Although this need has been discussed, making this extension continues to be a challenge for BSC. Part of the difficulty stems from the fact that there still is not an effective, sustainable, and adopted framework for academic assessment in place. Thus, we cannot simply take what is working in one area and translate it into another area. Past history, opinions, and perceptions about assessment among faculty and staff represent another obstacle that the institution has experienced. BSC needs to overcome the negative viewpoints and past inconsistencies in order to successfully implement and sustain a comprehensive assessment program. Participation in the Assessment Academy could provide us with the resources, support, and guidance to facilitate a cultural shift regarding assessment at our institution.

Addressing this need is vital for BSC, as high quality education and student success are central to our institution's mission and strategic plan. Programs and services offered at BSC have been developed with the intention of supporting student success. Assessment must align with and reflect the intentions of the institution. Furthermore, curricular and co-curricular activities need to be joined together to get a more accurate and holistic picture of student learning at BSC.

### 3. Why is the Academy key to the institution's success?

BSC has been trying to move assessment forward for some time, and while progress has been made, the state of assessment on the campus is still lacking. BSC needs structured assistance with moving our institution to a collective, comprehensive view of assessment and in the development of specific strategies to implement assessment successfully across the campus. Projects have been initiated to achieve this end goal in part in the past, but those projects have been narrow and foundational in nature. Tying every component together and constructing assessment from a forward-thinking perspective continue to be challenging for our institution. In order to achieve this goal, a cultural shift is necessary, and this will take time. An opportunity like

the Assessment Academy that spans more than a semester or an academic year offers a more realistic and meaningful chance to instigate and cultivate such a change.

Another opportunity that the Assessment Academy offers that is crucial to BSC's success is the chance to work in conjunction with a mentor and other institutions. The guidance that these entities could offer in tailoring and implementing best practices on our campus would be immensely beneficial. We have looked at assessment examples from other institutions that appear to be successful, but to emulate their final product can be difficult without knowing or having some guidance on the steps to take to achieve that end result. The critiques, expertise, and dialogue with a mentor and colleagues at other institutions would be fruitful in spurring our assessment efforts forward.

4. What are the institution's goals for the Academy? What will be the institution's focus during the Academy (e.g., projects, initiatives, activities, work)?

The goals for the Assessment Academy and the strategies/initiatives to achieve those goals are as follows:

Goal #1. To develop a comprehensive assessment plan that incorporates curricular and co-curricular activities.

1.1. Review and develop program learning outcomes appropriate for co-curricular programs.

1.2. Integrate BSC's institutional essential learning outcomes into co-curricular programs.

1.3. Retool our supporting structure for comprehensive assessment. Current assessment processes are curricular in focus. A mechanism needs to be developed for bringing together curricular and co-curricular assessment in such a way that supports the implementation, monitoring, and reporting of both in a cohesive manner.

Goal #2. To build a structure for using, reporting, and maintaining curricular and co-curricular assessment data.

2.1. Establish a process for regularly and systematically assessing the assessment program in order that improvements can be made and student learning can be best supported.

Goal #3. To integrate curricular and co-curricular assessment efforts with current student data tools (e.g., CCSSE, SENSE, SSI/PSOL, VFA, SAM, etc.)

During the Academy, BSC will bring together an interdisciplinary, cross-functional team at the Academy Roundtables to create a plan for the specific projects and activities that need to be accomplished in order to achieve the goals outlined above.

## Commitment and Capacity

5. What evidence demonstrates the institution's commitment to and capacity for assessment of student learning (include evidence of presidential and academic commitment to full participation, plans for involving individuals and groups to accomplish goals, financial support and the inclusion of the broader institutional community)?

The need for greater attention to assessment has been emerging at BSC, particularly over the last few years. As mentioned previously, the institution recognized the need and created the Institutional Assessment Coordinator position 3 years ago. More recently, a group from BSC attended the AQIP Strategy Forum in October 2014, and assessment once again came to the forefront during that time. Administration, including the President and Vice Presidents, recognizes the continued need and has increased their support to engage in opportunities to move assessment forward. Participation in the Assessment Academy has been considered at the institution since returning from the Strategy Forum, with the decision to pursue the opportunity now based on the culture, context, and present needs of BSC.

Similar to many other initiatives at BSC, assessment is considered to be best approached by involving individuals in a cross-functional manner. It is anticipated that committees and sub-groups will be involved on campus in the implementation of projects and activities to accomplish our goals for the Assessment Academy.

BSC has pre-budgeted line items for assessment development in the current institutional budget and will continue those line items for the duration of the Academy participation.

## Purpose and Outcomes

6. What results are desired? What is the potential for impact on the institution? On learning and teaching? On organizational culture?

On a micro level, Academy participation will hopefully lead to the following:

1. Updated curricular and co-curricular materials;
2. New faculty and staff professional development activities;
3. A structure leading to evidence-based decision making;
4. An increased focus on student learning through the use of common language by all campus personnel.

Many of these changes are moving forward to a certain extent through the efforts of our AQIP action project focused on the reinvigoration of curricular assessment; however, there is a missing connection in that project to the needs related to other campus-wide programming efforts. Academy participation could round out the efforts that have been initiated, helping our institution achieve the ultimate, desired result of having a clear, focused direction for comprehensive assessment with streamlined implementation that will be sustainable over time.

The potential impact on BSC of reaching this result would be undeniable. The assessment structure at BSC is segmented and lacks a unifying framework. Yet, frequent conversations happen at all levels of the campus regarding the value of learning both inside and outside of the classroom. Aligning the mission, strategic plan, and assessment activities on campus will strengthen the learning environment for students and allow us to better support student success. The importance of assessment in improving student learning and success is acknowledged and embraced by administration and leaders across the institution. Once a well-developed, clear plan for comprehensive assessment is implemented, the attitude toward assessment will likely change on our campus.

7. How will the Academy contribute to the improvement of student learning at the institution?

Student learning is holistic, and assessment should be developed with that in mind. BSC provides opportunities for students to learn both inside and outside of the classroom, but we have yet to formally assess all of these efforts within a single structure. Through the development of a comprehensive assessment plan, the college will be able to effectively serve

our students by using the newly developed data systems to make informed decisions. The mentoring and partnerships gained through participation in the Academy structure will strengthen BSC's capacity to complete this project. Our campus, as with many community colleges across the nation, has and will continue to see managerial and leadership change over the next five years. A project of this importance cannot simply be put on the side and wait for the institution to find a new equilibrium. Instead, participation in the Academy and the connections established through the four-year cycle should be able to provide a grounding force that will help BSC navigate through this transition.

A key component to the implementation of a comprehensive assessment plan for all programming on campus is related to the recent adoption of institutional essential learning outcomes (IELOs). As the IELOs (Awareness, Communication, Thought) become integrated into our campus-wide programming efforts, it is essential that the assessment components be considered on the front end. While this will be a new process for our campus, we know that Academy personnel and participants will undoubtedly have similar experiences from other campuses. Our participation in the Academy structure and the collaboration of participants central to this experience could deeply enrich our journey through this project. Our team is excited about this possibility, and we embrace the opportunity to support others in like fashion.



## Institutional Contact Information

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### Primary Institutional Contact:

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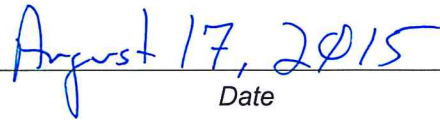
## Application Affirmation

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I affirm that this application represents the institution accurately and that the institution agrees, if admitted, to commit to meaningful and productive participation in the Assessment Academy for the full Academy cycle.



Signature of Institution CEO



Date

Dr. Larry C. Skogen

Printed Name of Institution CEO

Bismarck State College

Institution Name

1500 Edwards Avenue, PO Box 5587

Institution Address

Bismarck, ND 58506-5587

Institution City, State, ZIP

### Submission of Application

Please review the entire application for accuracy and completeness prior to submitting for review, as subsequent versions may not be accepted and incomplete applications may not be considered. Once complete, applications should be sent to [academy@hlcommission.org](mailto:academy@hlcommission.org) on or before the established deadline.