

Process for Evaluating and Reporting Academic Signature Core Competencies

All credit courses that satisfy academic requirements for certificate, diploma, and degree programs should provide students with one or more core competencies. Faculty who teach these courses play an important role in informing students and colleagues about the competencies they address in their courses. The purpose of this document is to outline a process through which faculty can assess their courses for core competencies and communicate the results to the college community.

Getting Started

Although faculty who have been involved in developing new degree programs have already started implementing the Academic Signature, most faculty have little experience with the Academic Signature and may not even be aware of recent changes in core competencies and levels of learning outcomes. These changes were made following feedback from faculty to the Academic Signature Steering Committee. Now charged with implementing the Academic Signature, the committee recommends that each department or program identify a faculty member who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Academic Signature. These department representatives may be Chairs, Coordinators, or others who are willing to take responsibility for implementation. They do not have to evaluate all the courses themselves, but they do have to interact with their colleagues and Dean to ensure that all of the courses in their department/program are evaluated and the results are recorded.

Evaluating Core Competencies within Courses

The process of evaluating the core competencies in a given course starts by reviewing the relevant sections of the Academic Signature Framework Document to become familiar with each competency (see http://www.douglas.bc.ca/_shared/assets/Academic-Signature-Framework-Document48268.pdf, pp5-9). After reading the description and learning outcomes for each core competency, the instructor(s) should make the following judgments: (1) does the course provide an *opportunity* for students to acquire this competency? and if it does, (2) which learning outcome level best captures what students are *expected* to achieve from the learning opportunities provided in the course? Note that learning opportunities do not have to be explicit nor do they have to be assessed with a direct form of evaluation. For example, students may have an opportunity to acquire competencies related to teamwork and receive a grade on a group project without explicit instruction regarding group processes or without receiving an evaluation for their interpersonal skills. The opportunity to engage in teamwork is *expected* to achieve a specific learning outcome or “level” of a core competency, but not all students may benefit equally from the opportunity. These are important distinctions to keep in mind when assessing core competencies—make judgments based on intentional opportunities and reasonable expectations for learning.

Recording Decisions on Course Templates

As instructors assess the core competencies and learning outcomes provided in their courses, they should indicate their decisions on an Academic Signature Course Template by putting a mark in the appropriate box. Course templates are available at the following link: http://www.douglas.bc.ca/_shared/assets/Academic-Signature-Course-Template48269.pdf. For example, after reading the section of the Academic Signature Framework Document that describes quantitative reasoning (see p. 6), an instructor may believe that his or her course provides learning opportunities for students to acquire the quantitative reasoning skills described in “learning outcome level 1.” Accordingly, the instructor would indicate that decision by placing an “x” in the level 1 box for quantitative reasoning. Faculty should record their decisions on electronic versions of the course templates and save them as Word documents. Please note, core competencies that are not met within a given course will be identified by the absence of any marked boxes. It is not necessary to specify that competencies are “not applicable.”

Resolving Inconsistencies between Instructors who Teach the Same Course

Where multiple instructors teach the same course, it is helpful for all instructors to agree to provide the same set of core competencies at the same level. If instructors cannot agree, then inconsistencies can be resolved in at least two ways. First, instructors can review the curriculum guidelines and reach an agreement about the learning opportunities and expectations that the course should provide, which may cause some faculty members to accommodate by modifying their course in some way. Second, instructors can agree to disagree and complete the course template to reflect the lowest learning outcome level provided by any one of them. Thus if even one instructor did not provide the core competency in his or her course, then no box would be ticked; similarly, if one instructor provided level 1 but all others provided level 2, then level 1 would be ticked. Note that those who wish to provide a higher level of learning outcome for the competency can still do so, but everyone will agree to provide at least the level indicated on the course template.

Approval Process

Completed Academic Signature Course Templates should be referred to the appropriate Faculty Education Committee for discussion and advice to the Dean, who provides the final approval.¹ The Deans also are responsible for ensuring that (a) course templates are completed for all relevant courses within their Faculties and (b) completed templates are posted on the college website (see below).

¹ Members of Education Council discussed the approval process for the academic signature course templates in 2006. Council members decided that the academic signature templates would be separate from curriculum guidelines and used for internal purposes. Further, it was decided that Education Council would not be involved in the process of approving course templates.

Posting Course Templates on the College Website

Course templates that have been approved by the Deans will be sent to the Communications and Marketing Office to be placed on the College website. Deans should add their signature to the electronic Word file by inserting a “picture” (i.e., JPEG image) of their signature. The course templates will be listed on the same web pages as the College’s Curriculum Guidelines (see <http://www.douglas.bc.ca/new-students/curriculum-guides/categori.html>). There will be links to this web page from other web pages that provide information about the Academic Signature. To see course templates for specific courses, users must first click on the appropriate department, then click on the course template link listed to the right of the course names.

Informing Students in Class

During the implementation process, students may start to hear about the Academic Signature. Some may wonder if they must take responsibility to satisfy core competencies. The answer is no. It is the responsibility of the Deans to ensure that programs are structured to provide all core competencies—students who complete course requirements will automatically obtain the core competencies, as they will be built into the programs. Once the Deans are satisfied that a given program provides all core competencies, the instructors within that program may be asked to include a written statement on their course outlines that indicates which core competencies are provided in the courses. The purpose of such statements is to inform students about the competencies they will be expected to develop. Note that the requirement to inform students may also apply to instructors of open enrolment “service courses” (e.g., ENGL 1130, BIOL 1103, PSYC 2300) that students are required to take in their programs. It is the responsibility of the Dean to (a) notify instructors who provide service courses so that they can inform their students, or (b) find some other way (e.g., program information brochure) to inform program students about how the Academic Signature core competencies will be met. The latter approach is preferable during the early stages of implementation (i.e., prior to 2009) as it should create less confusion for non-program students in service courses.

Full Implementation Deadline

The College has set 2010-2011 as the first academic year in which the Academic Signature will be fully implemented in all credit programs. Most closed-enrolment programs and new degree programs will implement the Academic Signature much sooner than this. However, it will likely take a few years before the open-enrolment programs will have a sufficient number of course templates completed to demonstrate that the academic signature is fully implemented.