Background

Calhoun Community College has a long history of assessing student learning and using the results to make improvements in academic programs and services. In Fall, 2011, the General Education Outcomes Committee reviewed the College’s general education outcomes and proposed a combination and redefinition of the outcomes that reduced the original six outcomes to the three listed below:

1. **Critical Thinking**: Students will demonstrate problem-solving skills by gathering and analyzing information and by applying logic and reason to formulate and support claims.

2. **Communication Skills**: Students will demonstrate reading, writing, speaking, and computer skills at the college level.

3. **Cultural Diversity**: Students will demonstrate a broader knowledge of the world as a result of their coursework at the college.

Essentially, Quantitative Skills, Scientific Reasoning, and Critical Thinking were combined into a single Critical Thinking outcome during the review, and Information and Computer Literacy was considered a Communication Skill by the committee. Cultural Diversity was retained as is because of the diversity of our service area in the state, and the recognition of the global nature of the economy for the foreseeable future.

These learning outcomes are assessed in general education courses using common activities/test items/writing assignments adopted by the department in which the particular course is taught. In addition to common departmental components for assessment, the College uses two nationally-recognized instruments to assess student learning outcomes.

- **CAAP – Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency** – used to assess scientific reasoning, quantitative analysis, and communication skills. (Administered annually since 2007)

- **CCSSE – The Community College Survey of Student Engagement** – used to assess all learning outcomes from the student’s perspective. (Administered annually since 2008)

**Why CAAP?**

Calhoun chooses the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) instrument because it allows the College to measure students’ achievement with national user norms and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of Calhoun’s general education program. CAAP is also research-based and developed by ACT, an independent organization and leader in assessment.
**Student Test Areas**

CAAP offers assessments in six areas:

- Mathematics
- Reading
- Writing Skills
- Writing Essay
- Scientific Reasoning
- Critical Thinking

Calhoun administers at least two of the test modules each year. In 2014, Writing Essay and Critical Thinking were selected as the CAAP test modules. The CAAP Test is administered during Assessment Week which typically occurs in spring of each year. The test was not administered in 2013, based on the assessment schedule adopted by the college.

**Number of Students Tested**

A total of 486 Calhoun students participated in the CAAP assessment in 2014. These students were selected from randomly-selected day and evening classes in Decatur and Huntsville. Of the 486 students, 228 completed the Writing Essay assessment and 280 completed the Critical Thinking assessment. A total of 22 students took both tests.

**Student Demographics**

Students participating in the 2014 CAAP assessments are representative of Calhoun’s overall population. More than half of CAAP participants were female (55%), and most (77%) had a GPA of 2.51 or greater. The demographics outlined in the following charts provide further information about the students' ethnicity, age, cumulative GPA, and enrollment status.

**Ethnicity**

White / Caucasian ......................... 332
African American / Black ................. 78
Mexican American ......................... 12
American Indian/Alaskan Native .......... 10
Puerto Rican/Cuban/Hispanic ............. 8
Asian/Pacific Islander ..................... 5
Filipino ...................................... 1
Other/Unknown/Prefer not to respond .. 40
What is included on the Writing Essay module?

The CAAP Writing Essay Test is predicated on the assumption that the skills most commonly taught in college-level writing courses and required in upper-division college courses across the curriculum include:

- Formulating an assertion about a given issue
- Supporting that assertion with evidence appropriate to the issue, position taken, and a given audience
- Organizing and connecting major ideas
- Expressing those ideas in clear, effective language

The model developed by ACT for the Writing Essay Test is designed to elicit responses that demonstrate a student's ability to perform these skills. Two 20-minute writing tasks are defined by a short prompt that identifies a specific hypothetical situation and audience. The hypothetical situation involves an issue on which the examinee must take a stand and explain to the audience why the position taken is the better (or best) alternative.
In order to more clearly define the audience and provide a focus for responses, each prompt specifies the basis upon which the audience will make its decision. Situations and audiences defined in the writing prompts are constructed so that the required background knowledge and experience are within the command of college sophomores.

Source: ACT Website

**How is the Writing Essay scored?**

For the CAAP Writing Essay Test, ACT developed a six-point, modified holistic scoring system. Each essay is read by two trained raters who independently score the essay on a scale from 1 to 6 (1 being the lowest score, 6 the highest). The scores from the two raters for each of the two essays (four scores) are averaged for the reported score, which ranges from 1 to 6 in increments of .5. The two raters' scores for each essay must either agree or be adjacent to be averaged. If the raters' scores differ by two or more points, a chief scorer adjudicates and determines the reported score.

Each score point reflects a student's ability to perform the skills identified above. Essays are evaluated according to how well a student formulates a clear assertion on the issue defined in the prompt, supports that assertion with reasons and evidence appropriate to the position taken and the specified concerns of the audience, and develops the argument in a coherent and logical manner. A student obtains lower scores for not taking a position on the specified issue, for not developing the argument, or for not expressing those ideas in clear, effective language. A student who does not respond to the prompt is assigned a "not ratable" indicator rather than a score on the 1 to 6 scale.
How did Calhoun students perform on the Writing Essay when compared to similar students at other U.S. colleges?

**WRITING ESSAY**
Calhoun Mean Compared to National Mean
280 Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Calhoun Mean</th>
<th>National Mean</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
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**WRITING ESSAY**
Percentage of Calhoun Students Scoring at or Above the National Mean

- At or Above 45%
- Below 55%
What is included on the Critical Thinking test module?

The CAAP Critical Thinking Test is a 32-item, 40-minute test that measures students' skills in clarifying, analyzing, evaluating, and extending arguments. An argument is defined as a sequence of statements that includes a claim that one of the statements, the conclusion, follows from the other statements. The Critical Thinking Test consists of four passages that are representative of the kinds of issues commonly encountered in a postsecondary curriculum.

A passage typically presents a series of sub-arguments in support of a more general conclusion or conclusions. Each passage presents one or more arguments using a variety of formats, including case studies, debates, dialogues, overlapping positions, statistical arguments, experimental results, or editorials. Each passage is accompanied by a set of multiple-choice test items. A total score is provided for the Critical Thinking Test; no sub-scores are provided.

Content Specifications Summary for the CAAP Critical Thinking Test

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Category</th>
<th>Proportion of Test</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of elements of an argument</td>
<td>.53–.66</td>
<td>17–21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of an argument</td>
<td>.16–.28</td>
<td>5–9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extension of an argument</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>32</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: ACT Website
How did Calhoun students perform on the Critical Thinking Test when compared to similar students at other U.S. colleges?

**CRITICAL THINKING**
Calhoun Mean compared to National Mean
228 Students

- Calhoun Mean: 58.7
- National Mean: 60.8

**Percentage of Calhoun Students Scoring at or Above the National Man**
- At or Above: 32%
- Below: 68%
Do students ever see their results?

Students who participated in the CAAP assessments receive their results by mail, and a certificate is awarded to those students scoring at or above the national mean. Results are shared college-wide through President’s Staff meetings, Planning Council meetings, departmental meetings, and they are posted on the College’s website. CAAP results are also used as benchmarks for planning and effectiveness in academic and administrative units.

How are the results used by the College to make improvements?

The primary purpose of Calhoun Community College is to create an environment that fosters student success. Therefore, the College continuously seeks evidence that reveals problem areas and identifies strategies to produce positive results.

CAAP results are used to make improvements in instructional programs, student support services, and related administrative areas.