THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
EDUCATION & SOCIETY PROGRAM

Common Core Self-Assessment Tool
Higher Education & Teacher Preparation Faculty
by Ross Wiener and Candice McQueen, June 2014

Introduction to the Self-Assessment Tool: Introductory Education Courses

The Common Core State Standards articulate learning objectives for students in grades K-12 in mathematics and literacy. More than 40 states and Washington, DC have adopted these academic standards, making the vast majority of prospective teachers responsible for teaching them. Common Core standards represent a paradigm shift for teaching and learning in K-12 in several significant ways, presenting an exciting and challenging opportunity to improve education in broad and deep ways.

Teacher preparation programs have a special opportunity and responsibility to integrate Common Core into the experience and instruction of aspiring teachers so that new teachers can successfully use the Common Core to improve student learning. *This self-assessment tool was developed specifically to assist higher education faculty in exploring the extent to which Common Core is reflected in the content and instruction of teacher preparation courses.*

What distinguishes Common Core standards? First, the standards are explicitly aimed at preparing *all* students for success in postsecondary education and career pursuits. In practical terms, this means an emphasis on developing students' critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and communication skills. These higher-level expectations are vital for making education outcomes more equitable, but many aspiring teachers have not benefitted from these expectations or experiences in their own education. Teacher preparation must cover the content of Common Core while at the same time modeling instruction that helps teachers understand and achieve Common Core expectations.

Second, Common Core standards are relatively brief compared to prior standards and written in clear, concise language. If you have not had the opportunity to read the standards for yourself, that's an important first step to using this guide because nothing can substitute for direct knowledge of the actual standards. Tomorrow's teachers enter a profession that is governed by the Common Core; responsibility for preparing these teachers demands familiarity with these foundational standards.

After becoming familiar with the standards, this self-assessment can assist you in determining if you have considered the full depth and breadth of the standards as it impacts both *what* you teach and *how* you teach aspiring teachers. This tool can be used for collaboration and conversation with colleagues, as a springboard for professional learning with faculty or as an individual self-assessment for specific courses.

The Common Core self-assessment tool has been designed to assess three different aspects of teacher preparation programming: This set of question is designed for a self-assessment of introductory teacher preparation courses to assess their integration of the Common Core standards. There also are two additional documents with reflection questions designed for courses preparing teachers for Mathematics and English-Language Arts/other courses that must integrate literacy instruction.

Completing this self-assessment and exploring the implications with colleagues can establish a lead role for teacher preparation in making the vision of Common Core a reality. The questions are offered as an open-source resource for faculty in teacher preparation programs and are meant to be augmented, adapted and modified in ways that support inquiry and continuous improvement in preparing teachers.

Course Assessment: Preparing Teachers for Common Core Instruction in Introductory Education Courses

Questions to consider when developing a course:

1. **What do entry-level teacher education majors need to understand about Common Core standards?**

2. **How do I connect students' previous educational experiences to the understanding of the Common Core shifts?**

3. **How am I scaffolding the students' knowledge of Common Core? What will they need to know from my class in order to extend their learning in upper-level education courses?**

4. **What relevant connections, stories, videos, etc. can I use in order to make Common Core meaningful knowledge?**

5. **How do I encourage all my students to view themselves as future teachers of literacy? What examples can I use to show literacy instruction across the curriculum?**

6. **Are the chosen texts and articles at or above end-of-high school expectations for text complexity (defined in Appendix A of Common Core ELA standards)?**

7. **In what way(s) do I model and engage students in the following:**
    a. Critical thinking
    b. Problem solving
    c. Collaborative thinking
    d. Critiquing the reasoning of others
    e. Using academic and domain-specific vocabulary
    f. Evidence-based writing

8. **How does Common Core fit into the historical discussion of schooling in America, particularly when learning about NCLB, RTTT, and other major programs and initiatives?**

9. **How can I specifically model Common Core strategies so that students recognize the strategies in action?**

10. **Am I allowing myself adequate time to dive deeper into topics, rather than quickly "covering" multiple topics? Are there topics that can be abbreviated or eliminated to spend more time going deeper on aspects of teaching that are most unfamiliar and challenging to my students?**

11. **In what ways should the students be exposed to information on the Common Core standards?**
    a. Informational videos
    b. Articles
    c. Blogs
    d. Reading the actual standards
    e. Professional websites (e.g. Achievethecore.org)