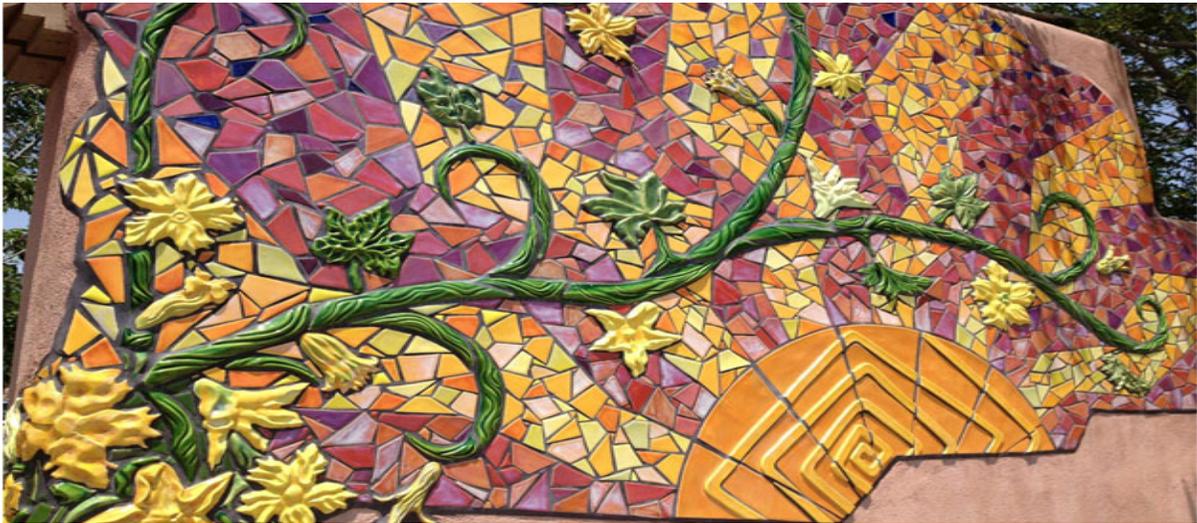


**The Fourth Annual Assessment Conference of the  
Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education  
(AALHE)**

**“Emergent Dialogues in Assessment”**

**June 2 – 4, 2014**

**Albuquerque, New Mexico**



# **Proceedings**

I am pleased to share with you the inaugural edition of the AALHE Conference Proceedings. This document has been compiled so that all AALHE members can access information that was discussed at each annual conference. While not all presenters submitted materials, those that did were reviewed by the Editor and Assistant Editor for inclusion in this exciting document.

As you know, AALHE is a professional association for those of us who are assessment practitioners at colleges, universities, and in higher education support organization. Our mission is to provide resources and a forum to support assessment practitioners' professional development and the open discussion of issues, strategies, policies, and processes association with higher education's use of assessment as a tool to improve student learning. This 2014 AALHE Annual Conference Proceedings was created to support the work that you do at your institution or organization.

Please read through this document and feel free to contact those presenters whose ideas have sparked interest for you. It is with this networking and collegial communication that our field can continue to grow to support learning in higher education.

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.  
Chief Academic Officer  
Walden University

AALHE is a professional association for assessment practitioners at colleges, universities, and higher education support organizations. It provides resources and a forum to support assessment practitioners' professional development and the open discussion of issues, strategies, policies, and processes associated with higher education's use of assessment as a tool to improve student learning and institutional effectiveness in fostering student success.

Edited by Dr. Ed Cunliff and Ms. Tracey Romano  
University of Central Oklahoma

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## Moving Beyond the Comps to Longitudinal Assessment of Student Identities

M.J. Best  
MBest@edgewood.edu

Suzanne C. Otte Allen  
SOtteAllen@edgewood.edu

Edgewood College  
Madison, WI

### Abstract

In an effort to replace the more traditional comprehensive exam for a doctoral program, we synthesized available literature and infused the Dominican tradition of our college to create a program assessment system based on increasing student capacity in three identities: academic writer, scholarly researcher, and Edgewood leader. We established a conceptual framework for the pedagogy of teaching leadership tied to a set of values for a diverse group of students. In conjunction with the research on leadership, the normative values of truth, community, justice, compassion, and partnership were relied upon to form a holistic leadership identity. The foundational works, program documentation, and literature related to the identities of academic writer and scholarly researcher are shared. In addition, self-reflection plays an important role within the Dominican ethos and is both incorporated into the program assessment system as well as supported by the literature. The presentation will inform participants of ongoing efforts by a doctoral program to build an assessment system that fulfills the college's mission and helps cultivate student capacity as Edgewood leaders, academic writers, and scholarly researchers.

*Keywords:* assessment, portfolio, comprehensive exam, doctoral program, leadership, values, student identity, reflection

### Edgewood College and the Dominican Ethos

Edgewood College is a small Midwestern, Dominican, Catholic college. The College is sponsored by the Sinsinawa Dominican sisters who play a prominent role at the college. The college offers baccalaureate, master, and doctoral programs. In 2011 the College enrolled 1550 undergraduate students and 700 graduate students. We are proud to have an increasingly diverse student population.

Four constructs help define the Dominican ethos. First construct is the normative values of truth, community, justice, compassion, and partnership. Second is the *studium*: the commitment to study, reflect, and act/share the fruits of that contemplation. Third is the mission of the college which is to connect learning, beliefs, and actions. The final construct is the motto of the College: *cor ad cor loquitur*, Latin for 'Heart speaks to Heart', which is manifested in three key questions:

- Who am I and who can I become?
- What are the needs and opportunities of the world?
- What is my role in building a more just and compassionate world?

## **History of the Doctoral Program at Edgewood College**

Edgewood College had a traditional structure for its doctoral program, but featured an accelerated program utilizing a blended format (some course work was completed on line and some during Saturday classes). The program consisted of content course work, the comprehensive exam, followed by the proposal, admission to candidacy, a research sequence, and finally dissertation defense and publication. The doctoral program began in 2000 with a K-12 administrator emphasis and the inclusion of a superintendent license (WI). Over the next ten years the program began to attract students employed and interested in higher education. The program eventually moved to K-16 focus, and then in 2008 broke into two distinct cohorts with separate content and concentrations, but carried the same traditional structure. Both concentrations continue to rely heavily on adjunct faculty and confer an Ed.D. degree.

Faculty all hold doctoral degrees (a combination of Ph.D. and Ed.D.) and come to the program with a content expertise. In the Higher Education Concentration, there are currently three sections, blended in two locations and one fully on-line. The online section is in its third year and is now attracting students outside of the state of Wisconsin and outside of the country. Our curriculum for the on-line program is being modified to include a more global focus.

The program is three to three and a half years in length. The content courses fulfill 36 credits in content that covered salient elements from faculty and programs, to student life, to diversity and inclusion to, legal issues, including finance and leadership guided by the Edgewood Values. Following the content course work, students begin the research phase of the program, but were required to complete the comprehensive exams during that time period. Students generally take one and a half to two years to complete a published dissertation which is supported by research coursework, a dissertation team, and targeted workshops.

## **Assessment of Former System**

We continually survey our students and graduates regarding program strengths and needs. Most often the surveys are completed on-line. In 2009 we engaged in focus groups to elicit more detailed information related to the new “concentration,” content, and program. We learned that our students were focused on research, beginning chapter writing, and preparing for a proposal when they needed to take a time to go back and review their content coursework. Students informed us that that exercise felt like regurgitation. Student communicated sentiments such as if we were going to ask specific questions about the content courses, we should tell them when they were engaged in the coursework; and faculty had graded the students on course content, why were we seeking additional information?

At the same time, program leaders were reviewing the literature and contemplating a more meaningful organizing element for the doctoral program where students could move more seamlessly through the content and the dissertation. We began with Boyer's foundational research on the “Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate” (1990) and extended

the concept to a continual quest toward perfecting a leadership style that is filled with continuous acts of inquiry, discovery, application, integration and modification of leadership philosophy throughout a graduate's career.

As we began to conceptualize a new assessment system, we dove into the literature. We used Astin and Antonio's (2012) Input, Experience, Output (IEO) model of assessment to begin to form the structure of a new assessment model. We considered our emphasis on reflection in the Dominican *studium*, in addition to research on self-reflection (i.e. Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Guthrie & Jones, 2012; Le Cornu, 2009; Smith, 2011) to begin to incorporate reflection into the program assessment model. An examination of feedback models (Black & William, 1998; Sadler, 2010) provided guidance for faculty and for the program assessment we were beginning to conceptualize. We also examined the Spellings Report (2006) which reviewed leadership, access, affordability and the value of higher education in this country. Lueddeke's (1999) research on constructivist approaches helped to inform the techniques we used to implement change for faculty and students. Experts on teaching and learning from Dewey (1938) to Piaget (1952) were the touchstones we continually returned to as decisions were made regarding assessment of student learning. Finally, Smith's (2011) work on reflection and constructivism also helped inform the reflection pieces of an assessment system that could move us past the comprehensive exams.

Simultaneously, the broader college and the overall school of education were adding an electronic portfolio for students. So, to make sense of the information above and to stay true to our college mission, we began to build a program assessment system that would fulfil the following criteria:

- Be forward looking and based on the literature,
- Support accreditation,
- Use the IEO model of assessment, emphasizing growth over time,
- Increase student capacity,
- Add continuity for students, and
- Enhance and strengthen students' identity

### **Moving Beyond the Comps**

After two years of transition and adjustment, we created three identities that students cultivate over the duration of the program: Academic Writer, Scholarly Researcher, and Edgewood Leader. We use key assessments and student reflections as data sources for program assessment. Students are expected to grow in knowledge, skills and dispositions acquired throughout the program and further honed after program completion as the student moves through her/his leadership career. The portfolio for the Edgewood College Doctoral program is designed to house reflections and key artifacts from each course in the content sequence. Each key artifact is related to her/his identity as a demonstration of student growth and learning. Students will also provide peer review and potentially create a professional portfolio.

Synthesizing the available literature and our own Dominican tradition, we created this assessment system based on three identities to replace the more traditional comprehensive exams. For example, we used the work of Guthrie, Bertrand Jones, Osteen, and Hu (2012) to

establish a conceptual framework for the pedagogy for teaching leadership, in particular for diverse students. These authors found that seamless learning, experiential learning, sensitive use of language, and opportunities for structured and unstructured reflection were vital to cultivating student identities as leaders. In conjunction with these methods, we rely heavily on the normative values of truth, community, justice, compassion, and partnership to form the leadership identity. Among many other academic resources, we employ foundational works to encourage student growth in academic writing (APA 6<sup>th</sup> edition; Swales & Feak, 2012) and scholarly research (Burke, 2009; Creswell, 2012).

## Summary

This unique program assessment serves several purposes. The first is to cultivate student identity in three areas: academic writer, scholarly researcher, and Edgewood Leader. The second purpose is to demonstrate that a student has successfully completed the content course requirements of the Edgewood College doctoral program and demonstrated the Dominican ethos as it relates to leadership and scholarship. The third purpose is to demonstrate that she/he is ready to transition to the research and dissertation phase of the program. The fourth purpose is to serve as a program assessment in which the faculty and administration can identify areas of discontinuity in student growth and areas of strength or challenge. The final purpose is to serve as a means of accreditation. We believe that this portfolio process offers a conceptual framework for students to continually cultivate their identities, as well as serve multiple programmatic needs.

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## **Developing Assessment Champions in a Resistant Environment**

Penelope W. Brunner  
Associate Vice President Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Planning  
brunnerpw@cofc.edu

Karin W. Roof  
Director Academic Assessment and Strategic Planning  
roofk@cofc.edu

College of Charleston

### **Abstract**

Southern College had resistant, long-tenured faculty who resided in department and school silos, little collaboration among programs, and an administration that allowed black holes to minimize shared knowledge and feedback. With an accreditation report looming, an Institutional Effectiveness office provided structure for assessment champions to emerge. The process the office developed included: 1) *Creating Transparency* through providing consistent definition and web presence. 2) *Developing Structure* that included a cross-divisional assessment committee. 3) *Increasing Collaboration* among programs, schools, and administration. And, 4) *Requiring Ownership* by faculty, department chairs, and deans. Utilizing a somewhat fictionalized case and two group activities, this presentation focuses on approaches that moved a campus to allow the development of assessment champions. As a result, the College now has an assessment structure and process that not only meets ever-increasing accreditation standards but provides faculty with tools for improving student learning. And as the system matures, there is greater dialogue among colleagues, programs, and all campus stakeholders.

**Key Words:** Assessment, Resistance, Change, Collaboration, Institutional Effectiveness, Transparency

### **The Case of Southern College**

Located in a midsize coastal community, Southern College attracts students who are drawn to the historic charm and laid back, but affluent, lifestyle offered by the city. The student population of approximately 12,000 is 65% female, and more than 50% are from out of state. After experiencing enrollment and program growth in the late 1990s, development of the College's internal policies and procedures lagged behind and this led to regional accreditation compliance issues in 2006. Substantive change documentation and assessment of general education competencies were particularly troublesome, and the College was placed on sanctions by its accreditor for two years.

This morning's meeting with the Provost's Office had Jan Norton reeling. She was recently hired to help the College develop its five-year report which was due in two years. Unfortunately, for many years, the College operated without a defined system of schools or deans, and much of the

academic control was delegated to an increasing number of autonomous department chairs who appeared unaware or unimpressed by regional accreditation. Stating that “the College did fine in the past without all these new rules,” one dean even declared that he had “no intention of establishing any type of assessment practice.” Jan knew, however, that the larger, more complex organization had a greater need for formal processes and well-developed policies. She had hoped to have support from the Provost’s Office, but in the meeting this morning she found that all three associate provosts—all of whom had been at the College for more than twenty years—were in agreement with the dean and long-tenured faculty. They were used to developing rules, which remained hidden, and expected anyone new to “learn the culture.”

The only undergraduate program review being followed had been that mandated by the State, and even those reports were mixed as to quality and usefulness. Once the State-imposed system was placed on hiatus, it was obvious that the lack of knowledge regarding assessment was widespread. In other words, the process had never become a part of the internal culture. Policies, guidelines, and timelines were often ignored; reports were inconsistent, incomplete, or nonexistent because no feedback had ever been forthcoming. Deans and department chairs assumed reports remained unread. New programs had been added without proper notification, and departments and schools were misaligned. While Southern College had a strategic plan, there seemed to be a lack of connection between program goals and institutional initiatives.

Due to the silos and autonomous structuring, assessment and accreditation reporting became the primary responsibility of a single office—the Assessment Office—in which Jan now found herself. She knew that the upcoming report required assessment of learning outcomes for all academic programs. But, she also knew that the Provost’s Office was not going to provide a lot of support or encouragement. She would have to find other ways of building a culture of assessment within Southern College. As Jan thought about the looming task, she reminded herself that she was blessed to have the staff she inherited: Heidi, a Psychology PhD; Nancy, a Southern College graduate; and Esther, a competent administrative assistant. All had been with the College long enough to help provide institutional memory.

## **The History**

The above, fictionalized case shares many of the same circumstances faced by the actual College in which we work: resistant, long-tenured faculty resided in school silos; little collaboration was experienced among programs; and administration had allowed black holes to minimize shared knowledge and feedback. From 2008-2010, the College remained on sanctions from the regional accreditor due to non-compliance with general education standards. For the three years prior to its reaffirmation in 2007, the College followed an assessment process that allowed academic departments a year of planning, a year of data collection, and a year for reporting of assessment activities. The areas assessed were tied to departmental goals and were discussed in the reaffirmation report submitted in 2006; however, following reaffirmation, systematic program and institutional assessments were suspended.

In 2011, facing an interim report due in the spring of 2013, the College recognized once again that an assessment process would have to be put in place. The Office for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning (OIEP) was developed by a new Associate Vice President. And, as part of the office reorganization, a Director of Academic Assessment was given direct oversight for academic assessment activities within the broader structure of institutional effectiveness. As a result, many changes were made in the assessment process to ensure that the College remains in compliance with federal, regional, and state requirements and to develop a culture of assessment and accountability.

## **The Approaches**

### 1) Create Transparency

The Office for Institutional Effectiveness and Planning serves as a consulting office that works directly with all stakeholders to ensure that accreditation standards are interpreted and applied consistently throughout the campus. Its purpose is outlined in its mission.

In order to encourage transparency, the OIEP immediately designed a web presence that included all historical accreditation documents, accreditation standards, and all annual assessment reports. Newly developed resources, such as an assessment guide, rubrics, and links to best practices were made easily accessible. Supporting documentation such as institutional survey reports (e.g., NSSE, BCSSE, FSSE, CIRP, ETS, Annual Senior Exit Survey, and Alumni Survey Reports) were made consistent, coherent and readily available.

### 2) Develop Structure

Beginning in the 2011-2012 academic year, an annual assessment cycle was developed for the systematic submission and review of program assessment plans that include outcome statements and performance expectations. This structure provided a path for assessment plans to be submitted for review by the Deans' offices and submitted to OIEP in the fall. In the spring semester, reports that included assessments and use of results were submitted to the Deans' office for initial review. They then were submitted to the Provost for review and response. The President's Office had the final review. For the Graduate School, the assessment process also included program review.

The Deans' Assessment Committee (DAC) was formed in 2011 to work with the OIEP in promoting best assessment practices and to ensure the College remained in compliance with accreditation standards. The DAC, which is a standing committee, was charged with coordinating outcomes assessment activities across the disciplines. Each DAC member, typically an Associate Dean, served as an assessment liaison among the academic programs. Members reviewed outcomes and rubrics and ensured that meaningful student learning outcomes assessments were in place in each academic program. Completed assessment rubrics were shared and discussed within DAC meetings and were communicated back to program coordinators. This feedback process allowed program coordinators to work with faculty and, as necessary, school assessment liaisons and/or the OIEP to revise plans for the coming academic year.

### 3) Collaborate Internally

For academic units, the Deans' Assessment Committee (DAC) members became responsible for coordinating the submission of assessment plans/reports to the academic dean.

Other responsibilities of the Assessment liaisons included:

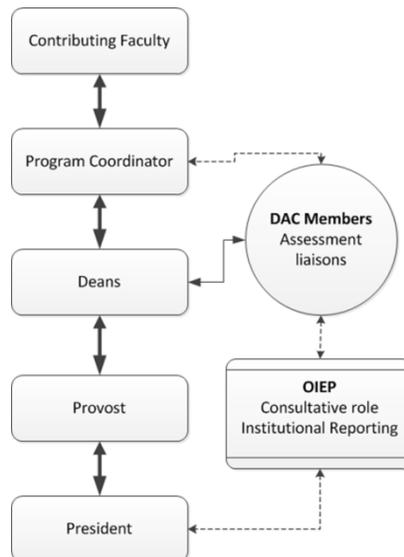
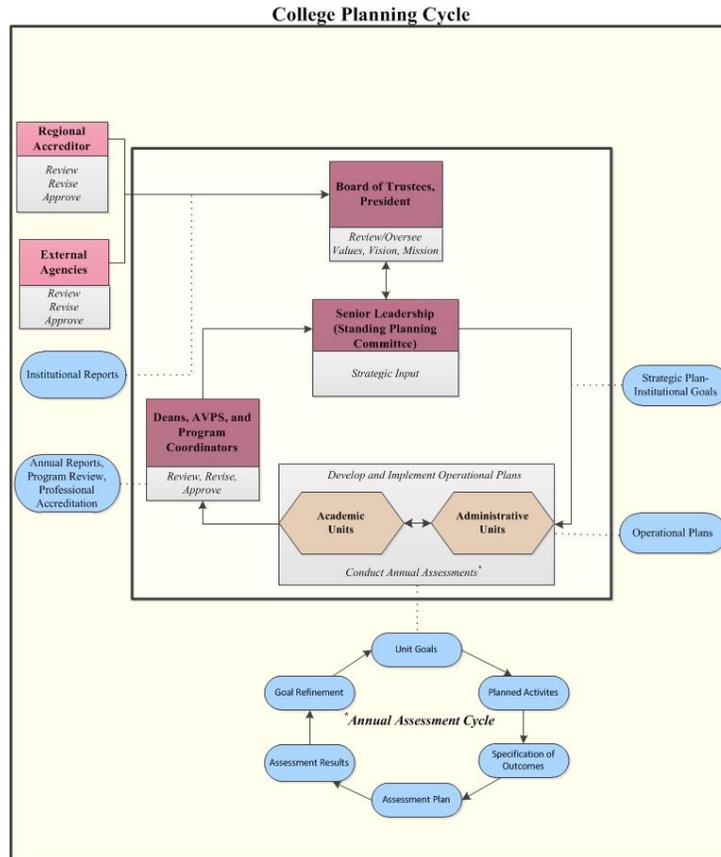
- helping to create and maintain a culture of assessment in each school/major/program at the College.
- motivating faculty and staff participation in all steps of the assessment process.
- involving students in the assessment process to ensure their awareness of major/program goals and their important role in the process.
- working with the department chairs to coordinate assessment efforts.
- generating ways to involve external stakeholders in meaningful assessment activities.
- working with other campus entities to include accessible data in direct or indirect measures of learning.
- coordinating and collaborating with other campus programs to encourage student learning, rubric development, or faculty development.
- ensuring that new faculty and staff orientation includes information about assessment.

### 4) Require Ownership

Once structure was provided, it was important to transfer assessment ownership to faculty members and deans within the schools. The College's history of placing all accreditation matters in the hands of one office resulted in a difficult shift—that remains ongoing today. The OIEP still reviews the annual assessment reports—but works with DAC members to provide feedback to program coordinators. Through workshops and individual consultancies, the OIEP has continued to provide a consistent message and to remain vigilant about deadlines.

For the Interim Accreditation Report, the College had 100% participation from academic programs; and no recommendations or sanctions were handed down from the accreditation team. The Deans' Assessment Committee members were definitely the champions that stepped forward to learn new skills and to liaise between an administrative office and their individual program coordinators. As the College approaches its reaffirmation report due in 2016, it is interesting to note that the structure remains intact but “alive” as best practices suggest continuous reshaping. The maturation of the system and the improved use of assessment results are becoming obvious; the knowledgeable assessment champions have been doing their jobs.

# Figures and Charts for Inclusion



## **“Advisory Committees – Vital Support in Assessment”**

Dr. Ed Cunliff  
ecunliff@uco.edu

Mrs. Elle Skelton  
eskelton1@uco.edu

University of Central Oklahoma

### **What Is an Advisory Board/Committee and Why Do I Care?**

Advisory boards or committees can be almost anything you want them to be, and they can serve a multitude of functions – including assessment. In this brief article we want to share some of the basic information regarding advisory committees from an assessment mindset, and a perspective of best practices based on a program life cycle model. The authors have recently been involved in the formation of a new academic program and its advisory board, and also bring years of experience and relevant research into the discussion.

Whether you refer to your group as a board or a panel or a committee might depend upon your sense of what might sound best in your insittuion and to the individuals you want to invite. A board may sound more formal and might suggest that you will be asking for a larger commitment than a committee. Although the title itself may not matter to you or the group, it is helpful to know what you will want from the group and the amount of time you will ask them to invest. (We will use board and committee interchangeably.)

Who you choose to invite can vary tremendously. Some advisory boards include faculty members from other institutions or recent graduates now employed in their field of study. Individuals from corporations or agencies that provide jobs in the field can make excellent partners and can offer a currency in perspective hard to gain from other sources. Some committees even include current students as a means of getting broader input than is normally gained through instruments such as faculty classroom evaluations. The authors favor those individuals representing potential employers of graduates as potentially having the most current view. Regardless of who you invite, be intentional and purposeful.

It may be appropriate to look at the outreach of the committee. How local or geographically spread out do you want the committee to be? State-wide? Regionally? There is a convenience and practical advantage to starting out in a local community where each member can meet on a regular basis. If a broader regional or national group is needed, perhaps to parallel the program focus then the question of method of communication arises. Can you consider other than face-to-face meetings? Skype/conference calls? Retreat formats rather than brief meetings? The options are greater than they have ever been.

In what can be understood as the life cycle of a program, we suggest that the advisory committee is most helpful from an assessment perspective at three phases: the beginning of a program, during its early formative and productive stages, and at a point of continuous improvement such as the first program review or after a number of graduates have left the

program and moved into jobs in which they are utilizing the skills, attitudes, and information gained in their studies.

## **Beginning**

Advisory boards can serve a valuable role at the start of a program. They can offer a realistic sense of what the student should look like at the end of the degree program – what should be their skills, attitude and knowledge base. In the case where national standards exist or suggest such a picture of graduates, the advisory board can advance a local twist whether that be geographic or more of a current, applied perspective. If students are likely to stay in the local area after graduation, then an advisory board consisting of local employers provides unique and necessary information, and may directly influence the hiring of your graduates.

An important question at the start of any new program is whether or not resources are available, especially the human resources. The board's input may help you assess whether or not you have the appropriate faculty and they may also be a potential source of referrals for contingent faculty should that be the approach to start-up or for a growth model. It probably would not, however, be a good practice to employ an advisory board member as an adjunct. Doing so would create an unwanted bias and could appear to be a conflict of interest.

It is often difficult to ask, at the starting of a new program, if it is really needed. That question should be asked and external advisors can provide necessary objectivity. Starting academic programs based on anecdotal assessment of need is not healthy practice and can often put the institution in a bad fiscal and reputational situation.

## **Formative and Early Stage of Productivity**

This is the point in the program's life cycle when there still may be some clarification of program goals and learning outcomes. Even a program that is neatly defined in terms of national standards may need some input from the board in order to ensure the learning outcomes will match local needs. This is of great value for the program and the students who will be more ready for the local job market, and job placement is a significant assessment measurement.

Looking towards already established national standards can help build and establish the structure needed in the development of the advisory committee and helps provide recruiting tools and skills needed in establishing the committee. Using the national standards will draw the attention and support of local professionals while also providing a point of departure for discussion of locally identified needs and interests.

The board can also prove to be a sounding board for curriculum mapping and sequencing of course work in the program. If a student is not able to make it past a certain point in the curriculum with a given amount of success, it should serve as an assessment calling for the student to realign their goals or their approach to studies. It is not that the board would have individual student information, but they can have input into "cut scores" or "check points" that can be powerful decision points for students.

While some faculty may consider it giving up control of the curriculum to ask the board for input, the process can help to make very strong connections that benefit everyone. As a sounding board, conversations about student perceptions of their work that may be known to the

board members can be beneficial. Rather than needing to wait for a formal assessment there may be opportunities to adjust curriculum as professionals in the field discuss changes that are impacting them or strengths/weaknesses they might see in students or interns.

If the advisory board is willing and able they may serve as “evaluators” for class presentations or capstone activities. It’s possible to bring “real world problems” that board members face into the classroom as living case studies. Board members may also be willing to come in as presenters allowing students to do their own formative assessments and reflections based on perspectives from the field.

### **Continuous Improvement – the Program Review Cycle**

Once the program is established and students are graduating, most institutions have a regular program review cycle. This is an excellent time to bring the advisory board in for, perhaps, a lengthier discussion than has previously occurred. Program data, existing assessments, narratives from students who have graduated and information such as licensure pass-rates if appropriate can be presented to the board for discussion. This does, however, require a sense of fearlessness on the part of the faculty to take third party feedback and to acknowledge that there may be need for change (something faculty expect students to accept on a daily basis). This is where diversity of thought comes into play.

If you are lucky enough to have advisory board members employing your graduates then this is a chance to visit them on their territory – physically and metaphorically. Not all board meetings have to be on your campus. Visit their campus. Ask what might be lacking in student preparation for work? What are the strengths that students are demonstrating? What work factors need greater focus in order for students to make better entry into the workforce?

### **Generic and Concluding Thoughts**

Use the time with your advisory board wisely. People volunteer for a variety of reasons, but if you have the right people on your advisory board it is unlikely that they will have time to waste. Respect their time and ask meaningful questions. If you have surveyed them regarding a particular issue, then feedback to them the consolidated input. Encourage their reflection and chance to discuss issues with them. Let them be a source of learning for you and each other.

While it is outside the scope of the advisory board as a means of program improvement, there are potential benefits that need to be recognized if for no other reason than for the sake of integrity. If you think you might use the board as a means of fund-raising, direct or indirect, then state so openly and honestly. Don’t bring them in to advise and then ask for money.

The benefits gained from using academic advisory committees in the assessment process are tremendous. The most significant benefit is in the applied perspective that can come from the use of local employers. Both the faculty and students will benefit from this “real world” contact.

# Managing Resistance through Developmental Rubrics for Assessment Systems

David K. Dirlam  
ddirlam@vwc.edu

Virginia Wesleyan College

## Abstract

“Buy-in” for program and service assessment varies. Three theories converge in surprising ways to solve this problem. Following Everett Rogers’ 50-year-old diffusion of innovation there are at least the *innovators*, *early adopters*, *majority*, and *laggards*. Motivations behind such changes were identified by the Japanese design methodologist, Noriaki Kano. A static product or service regresses over time from *surprisingly delightful* when the first effective models are introduced, to *desired* when they become widespread, and ultimately to *expected*. But these progressions are just the reverse of the developmental sequence for the sophistication of practices that Dirlam described at all AALHE conferences, which move over time from *beginning attempts* to *fundamental or easy learning* to *practical performance* to *inspiring discoveries or innovations*. According to Phillips, resistance to change occurs because users have learned to optimize the effectiveness of an earlier strategy across a variety of criteria. When a unique experience causes people to learn a new strategy, optimizing performance with it must begin over again but can ultimately lead to improvements across all criteria. Nearly 300 interviews of experts in trade, design, liberal arts and professional fields have shown that this progression works not along one dimension but across several dimensions at once. Last year, dimensions of developmental rubrics for assessment-system expertise were described that simultaneously allow providers to choose assessment practices, be exposed to more sophisticated options, and still meet accreditation standards. In this paper, we discuss commonly expressed resistances that we expect to ease making commitments to advance.

*Keywords:* assessment system, resistance, developmental rubrics, succession model, Kano Model, diffusion of innovation

How can an institution deal with the diverse forms of resistance to assessment, when not only are accreditors demanding program assessment but competition within higher education is challenging every program and institution?

The answer to this question begins with understanding it as a multifaceted developmental problem, involving personal, historical, and marketplace forces. Though highly complex, these influences can be greatly simplified through the use of some basic organizing tools including developmental modeling, diffusion of innovation, and the life-cycle of attractive designs.

A single developmental model fit data from three different thousand-sample studies of individual development of drawing and writing (Dirlam, 1997) and of the historical development of

developmental research strategies (Dirlam, Gamble, and Lloyd, 1999). This model generalized ecology’s Lotka-Volterra competition equations into a “Succession Model.” Basically, each strategy has a characteristic initial strength, growth rate, and competitive strength. Table 1 gives examples.

**Table 1.** Succession Model parameters and examples from drawing, writing, data analysis and ecosystems.

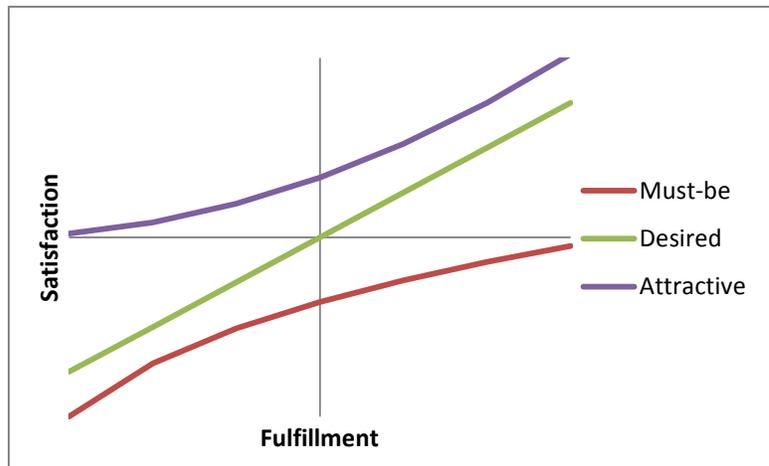
Levels	Parameters			Examples			
	Initial Freq	Growth Rate	Competitive Strength	Drawing Shapes	Writing Audience	Data Analysis	Ecosystem
<b>Beginning</b>	High	Very slow	None	Scribbles	Egocentric	Descriptive or Correlational	Lichens
<b>Fundamental</b>	Low	Very fast	Very little	Stick people	Correspondence	Difference Statistics	Weeds
<b>Practical</b>	Very Low	Moderate	Moderate	Solid objects	Group	Advanced Statistics	Conifers
<b>Inspiring</b>	Very Low	Moderate	Very High	Perspective	Abstract	Equation fits or networks	Oaks

The Succession Model was based on replacing prevalent, fast-growing strategies with less common (often more complex) but more effective strategies. Phillips (1999) provided an elegant model that explained resistance to such replacements as a problem in optimizing outcomes. Once we have found strategies that do a good job of optimizing outcomes for us, we tend to stick with those strategies. The reason is that small deviations from them almost always result in poorer outcomes. The only way to get out of such strategic dead ends is to make a developmentally strategic “leap” to a new class of strategies, in which the initial results might have diminished outcomes, but ultimately the opportunities for improvement are much greater.

The prevalence of strategic developmental leaps has long been recognized in studies of innovation. Roger’s (1983) *Diffusion of Innovation* argued that people adopt innovations in waves of early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. This implies different types of resistance with different time frames for resolution.

Deming Award winner, Noriaki Kano (1984) constructed a model of product quality changes over time that explains these differences. In his earlier work, Kano had the insight that product evaluation depended differently on the emotional reaction to and the functionality of the product or service in question. Innovative features are *attractive* when customers like them and they work well (see Figure 1). My favorite example is GPS on my 2008 phone (I did not activate it for 6 months, so was indifferent to poor functionality; but when it worked much better than expected, I was delighted). *Desired* features are evaluated on how well they work (the calendar

that prompted me to buy the phone). *Must-be* features have to work but do not generate more than indifference when they do (making calls). Kano's later observations (2001) of the historical change are useful here. Over time, *attractive*, innovative features move to *desired* and *desired* features move to *must-be*. In just six years after GPS appeared on my phone, it has moved from *attractive* all the way down to *must-be* quality.



**Figure 1. Kano Model**

Innovators create new features and watch them become adopted by others. Early adopters are familiar enough with desired features to seek out attractive ones but must make more effort to optimize the use of them. The majority wait until there are enough people to show them how to use a feature. The laggards wait until it is a necessity.

The preceding theories all involved comparing features that emerge at different times. In that sense they are one-dimensional. Features of complex products and services, however, are systems that emerge along multiple trajectories. In automobiles, for example, there might be one trajectory for drive-train performance, another for comfort, a third for user interface technology and so forth. The model in Table 1 has been introduced to nearly 300 experts in extremely diverse fields, who with only two exceptions generated 5-15 dimensions during interviews that usually took one to two hours. Though the model does not appear spontaneously, many interviewees reported that it felt both a natural and effective way to organize the emergence of their expertise.

The Dirlam et al. (1999) study looked not an individual but historical development through coding methods used in 912 research articles. The early work on drawing and writing showed that teachers using it could expedite development. Last year, (Dirlam, 2013, see Table 2) I proposed that a similar system could expedite group or institutional development in a presentation that proposed nine dimensions of the “Intricate Unfolding of Assessment Systems” (IUAS).

**Table. 2.** Intricate unfolding of assessment systems (IUAS)

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Fundamental</b>	<b>Practical</b>	<b>Inspiring</b>
<b>PREPARATORY ISSUES</b>				
Program Student Learning Outcomes (PLSO's)	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>UNMEASURABLE</b></p> <p>Stated in such a way that no unambiguous measure can be developed.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INCOMPLETE</b></p> <p>Too few (&lt; 5) or represent only a minor portion of the program's mission.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>COMPREHENSIVE</b></p> <p>Created either by a disciplinary accrediting agency or departmental faculty, the outcomes reflect all aspects of the program's mission and offerings.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>UNIQUE AND ANALYTICAL</b></p> <p>Collaboratively adapted rewordings of comprehensive outcomes for greater validity, reliability, program identity, and ease of communication to students and the public.</p>
Identify Current Practices	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SYLLABIC</b></p> <p>Refer to syllabi with no attempt to aggregate approaches across the program.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SELECTED</b></p> <p>Narrative description from a few courses in the program</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ENHANCEMENT CHECKLIST</b></p> <p>Provide a checklist of a few high impact practices that have been reported in the literature and have all faculty complete it for all courses.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>MULTI-DIMENSIONAL</b></p> <p>Use a multi-dimensional course design survey</p>
Ask Assessment Problem	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INSTRUMENTAL</b></p> <p>Comply with college, Federal financial aid, or accreditation requirements</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DEMONSTRATION</b></p> <p>Show what the program has accomplished.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PROGRAM QUESTIONS</b></p> <p>Learn things about the program that nobody has the answer to.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INNOVATION</b></p> <p>Find and test new ways to have impact on students that endure for decades and generate emergent effects.</p>

**Table 2.** Intricate unfolding of assessment systems (IUAS)

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Fundamental</b>	<b>Practical</b>	<b>Inspiring</b>
<b>METHODS</b>				
Levels of Students Who Provide Assessed Work	<b>SUMMATIVE</b> Program raters assess work from only one course (usually at the capstone level).	<b>FORMATIVE</b> Program raters assess work from specified Entry, Midpoint, and Capstone Courses.	<b>PROGRAMMATIC</b> Each student is assessed at least once per course.	<b>INTERACTIVE</b> Assessment details are mentioned during spontaneous interactions of program faculty with students in all courses.
Kinds of Program Assessment Measure Used	<b>DESCRIP-TIONS</b> Grades or narrative descriptions.	<b>GENERIC</b> Generic measures only loosely connected to PSLOs, like standardized tests or Likert-scale ratings with sequences which expand little by little (SWELL rubrics) and are the same across criteria.	<b>DEVELOPMENTAL</b> Classroom artifacts from representative Individual students are assessed by at least one faculty member using a tool that provides a measure of reliability and discriminates levels of student experience defined by the PSLOs (i.e., developmental rubrics).	<b>MULTIPLE</b> Assessments are compared with student performance on developmental ratings and a second type of assessment measure.
Collect and store the data	<b>POST FACTO</b> Use final exams or papers handed in.	<b>ONE-SHOT</b> Organize an achievement test setting or other single end-of-term assessment event	<b>AD HOC</b> Collect and store multiple assessments separately for each student (e.g., on paper or pdf) and later re-enter the results into a single location such as Excel.	<b>ON-LINE</b> Regularly and often use online tools survey or database tools to put all assessments into a single analysis format and allow reflections on them in comment fields.

**Table. 2.** Intricate unfolding of assessment systems (IUAS)

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Fundamental</b>	<b>Practical</b>	<b>Inspiring</b>
<b>RESULTS</b>				
Cycles Compared	1 YEAR	2+ YEARS	1 COHORT (4 YEARS)	MULTIPLE COHORTS
Analysis	<p><b>PERCENTAGES OR DESCRIPTIONS</b></p> <p>The % of students at each level who have achieved the SLOs or a general description of student performance.</p>	<p><b>RELIABILITY</b></p> <p>Correlations or percentages of agreement between independent raters or test-retest reliability either from a locally made test or from the standardized test documentation.</p>	<p><b>DIFFERENCES</b></p> <p>Tests for statistically significant differences between student experience levels.</p>	<p><b>NETWORK</b></p> <p>Networks of mutualistic or competitive activities. Course impact scores from a network of learning outcomes ratings.</p>
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>				
Program or Assessment Changes	<p><b>DEMON-STRATE</b></p> <p>Show value gained by students from the program.</p>	<p><b>CRITIQUE</b></p> <p>Show some areas for potential curricular innovation or assessment improvement.</p>	<p><b>EXPERIMENT</b></p> <p>Compare differential effects of curricular approaches.</p>	<p><b>CONTRIBUTE</b></p> <p>Help the assessment and accreditation communities improve their practice.</p>

**Table. 2.** Intricate unfolding of assessment systems (IUAS)

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Beginning</b>	<b>Fundamental</b>	<b>Practical</b>	<b>Inspiring</b>
Report Method	<p><b>DESCRIPTIONS</b></p> <p>Describe what was done and found in a story format.</p>	<p><b>STANDARD</b></p> <p>Use separate sections for outcomes, means of assessment, results, and use of results.</p>	<p><b>PROBLEM SOLVING</b></p> <p>Identify questions about curriculum that assessment could elucidate, describe changes in assessment and program from prior year, compare new with prior results, and relate conclusions about program changes to them.</p>	<p><b>ASSESSMENT RESEARCH</b></p> <p>Relate all aspects of a problem oriented report to literature in the discipline, educational research, or assessment.</p>
Intended Readers	<p><b>INTERNAL</b></p> <p>Program faculty and accreditation officials within the college.</p>	<p><b>INSTITUTIONAL PROFESSIONALS</b></p> <p>Faculty in any institutional department as well as board members administrators concerned with assessment.</p>	<p><b>INSTITUTIONAL STAKEHOLDERS</b></p> <p>Current and prospective VWC students, parents, and staff as well as institutional professionals.</p>	<p><b>THE PUBLIC</b></p> <p>Prospective employers of our students, conferences, journals, magazines, newspapers</p>

The multi-dimensional IUAS system allows program and service units the freedom to choose from multiple levels of participation along each dimension, while still meeting accreditation standards. Of the millions of possible patterns, the only ones that are non-compliant are *doing nothing* or the *just making plans to start doing something*. Nine of the dimensions have been studied for the last three years. These are Assessment Problem, Program Student Learning Outcomes, Levels of Students Providing Assessed Work, Kinds of Program Assessment Measures Used, Number of Assessment Cycles Compared, Analysis, Program or Assessment Changes, Report Method, and Intended Readers.

The first few years of use of the IUAS suggested how articulated resistance to change might connect with the developmental problem within each dimension. Casual observations based on experiences across 6 institutions are included in Table 3. <sup>1</sup>

Two new dimensions, Identifying Current Practices and Collecting Data, were added this year to address problems that emerged in other dimensions. These eleven dimensions involve just 44 concepts yet because development can proceed at different rates across the dimensions, they generate over 4 million patterns of doing program assessment. These are not all the possible patterns but they do include many useful and important distinctions for making assessment more useful to students, programs, and institutions. As such they are powerful tools in reducing the complexity of dealing with the development of program assessment.

<b>Table 3. Resistance and expertise in program assessment.</b>		
<b>Dimension of Program Assessment Development</b>	<b>Examples of Resistance to the Next Level of Assessment System Expertise</b>	
	<b>IUAS Fundamental Diffusion of Innovation Majority Kano Model Expected</b>	<b>IUAS Practical Diffusion of Innovation Early Adopters Kano Model Desired</b>
<b>PREPARATORY ISSUES</b>		
Program Student Learning Outcomes	<b>INCOMPLETE</b> Somebody told us we should focus on 3 outcomes.	<b>COMPREHENSIVE</b> Our program assessment results are just for faculty and accreditation use.
Identify Current Practices	<b>SELECTED</b> We already tell what we're doing in our syllabi and personal accomplishments forms.	<b>ENHANCEMENT CHECKLIST</b> This list of known enhancements is enough.

<sup>1</sup> A topic for discussion in the session will be that resistance might be mitigated by adopting different strategies for programs with different levels of assessment sophistication. Prochaska and colleagues have proposed such a model for clinical work (see Norcross, Krebs, and Prochaska, 2011).

**Table 3.** Resistance and expertise in program assessment.

<b>Examples of Resistance to the Next Level of Assessment System Expertise</b>		
<b>Dimension of Program Assessment Development</b>	<b>IUAS Fundamental Diffusion of Innovation Majority Kano Model Expected</b>	<b>IUAS Practical Diffusion of Innovation Early Adopters Kano Model Desired</b>
Ask  Assessment Problem	DEMONSTRATION  We know what we accomplishment but have to prove it to accreditation people.	PROGRAM QUESTIONS  There are more important problems but they are too hard to study.
<b>METHODS</b>		
Levels of Students Who Provide Assessed Work	FORMATIVE  Beginning, midpoint, and capstone are enough to learn about the program.	PROGRAMMATIC  Program assessment is too complicated to discuss in class with students.
Kinds of Program Assessment Measure Used	GENERIC  We use a national test like everybody else, so we don't have to worry about reliability.	DEVELOPMENTAL  There are no national tests for our discipline, so our rubrics are enough.
Collect and store the data	ONE-SHOT  Everybody is too busy during the term and we don't get any useful results anyway.	AD HOC  The administration can enter the data.
<b>RESULTS</b>		
Assessment Cycles Compared	2+ YEARS COMPARED  We started this new approach last year.	1 COHORT (4 YEARS)  Our accreditation will be over next year.

**Table 3.** Resistance and expertise in program assessment.

<b>Examples of Resistance to the Next Level of Assessment System Expertise</b>		
<b>Dimension of Program Assessment Development</b>	<b>IUAS Fundamental Diffusion of Innovation Majority Kano Model Expected</b>	<b>IUAS Practical Diffusion of Innovation Early Adopters Kano Model Desired</b>
Analysis	RELIABILITY The person who teaches statistics is too busy to help everybody.	DIFFERENCES We asked the person who teaches statistics to help us.
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>		
Program or Assessment Changes	CRITIQUE We found something we needed to change.	EXPERIMENT We compared two teaching approaches and found one to work better.
Report Method	STANDARD We did something different last year, so there's no need to mention it.	PROBLEM SOLVING We're not educational researchers, but our results were interesting to us.
Intended Readers	INSTITUTIONAL PROFESSIONALS Program assessment data is protected by FERPA.	INSTITUTIONAL STAKEHOLDERS We wouldn't want this data to get out of our college community.

At VWC, we are in our third year of evaluating program assessment progress using the IUAS model. The progress among 35 programs on each dimension across the first two years is shown in Figure 2. One interesting finding in Figure 2 is that the only dimension to show regression from 2012 to 2013 is problem identification. This is not a hugely significant effect ( $p=0.05$  that the score is equal to or below the mean, with an effect size of  $\phi=0.27$ ), but it was cause for concern. Doing assessment without an assessment problem reduces the chances of being able to use the results for anything more than critique. The difficulty of defining a problem that would be useful for course design was a key impetus for developing the course design survey introduced in another session of this conference (see these proceedings, “The Course Design Matrix: A critical link in formative program assessment”). Developmental rubrics for program

assessment define the student learning outcomes in observable terms. It is possible to create effective educational experiments without such a survey. But the efficiency of the research is enormously increased with data on the inputs—i.e. with the results of the Course Design Survey. A few cycles of interaction with IUAS ratings can help to clarify for program faculty the importance of this step.

There are several generalizations from experience with programs using the IUAS. First, methodological development proceeds independently across multiple dimensions ranging from defining learning outcomes to disseminating program assessment results. Within each dimension there are a few levels characterized by progressive refinement within a level followed by “developmental” leaps to a new type of assessment strategy. Resistance occurs mainly to making the leaps. Defining both the developmental leaps and the common justifications for resisting them facilitates making commitments to more advanced choices in subsequent assessment cycles. Once there are such commitments the process of optimizing can begin. Ultimately this process facilitates achievement of the goal of finding ways to improve designs of how programs serve student learning.

## **The Course Design Survey: A critical link in formative program assessment**

David K. Dirlam  
ddirlam@vwc.edu

Stuart Minnis  
with Kathy Merlock-Jackson, Lisa Lyon Payne, and Linda Ferguson

Virginia Wesleyan College

### **Abstract**

Program assessment gets exciting when faculty make educationally useful discoveries. There has been much recent interest in a small number of “High Impact Practices.” Considering that only a few educational practices have high impacts, however, implies educational usefulness is a “settled” issue. Course Design Survey (CDS) enable assessors to identify learning impacts for an astronomically large number of educational practice patterns using an easily countable number of options checked in a simple survey. This workshop describes how a CDS advances assessment, how to create them, how to identify useful analyses for various formative assessment designs, and includes a sample survey.

*Keywords:* developmental rubrics, learning outcomes network, course design survey

In an ASSESS Listserv posting last January, Ephraim Schechter offered an elegant solution to the problem of public disclosure impacting assessment bias. He proposed that “real accountability includes also reporting the data's impact on planning.... Closing the loop this way, providing context for data by saying what they told you and what you did or plan to do as a result, makes sense whether or not you're happy with what you found.” Programs can be proud when their assessment results help them make discoveries about learning. A Course Design Survey combined with Learning Outcomes Network ratings provides a way to ensure that programs will make discoveries: i.e., given a reasonable sample size (and our college of 1400 is plenty big) the probability of not discovering something reduces nearly to zero.

There were four steps from several different institutions in creating this impossible-to-avoid-discovery design. First, we used developmental interviews to create multidimensional rubrics with four levels for each practice:

1. Beginning involves taking a few minutes to try an activity
2. Fundamental involves taking a few months to learn basics about it
3. Practical involves taking a few years to get good enough to earn a living with the activity
4. Inspiring involves taking decades to contribute to the field

A single set of such rubrics can be used to rate student progress in any course across an entire program. They make it possible to compare student progress to a standard and beyond. They also result in enormous value-added effects, in contrast to grades which have similar averages for sophomores and for seniors.

The second step is to use such developmental rubrics to rate every student in every course across an entire program. Such a Learning Outcomes Network (LON) was first created at Hebrew Union College several years ago. After the first few terms of use, the bias-in-reporting problem discussed on ASSESS became apparent. With LON data it was possible to calculate both a reliability score and an impact score for all but capstone courses. Both calculations require a comparison across predecessor and successor instructors. If an instructor rates most of his or her students higher on a dimension than all predecessor instructors, then there are two interesting possibilities for successor raters. On the one hand, if the successors rate the students the same as the predecessors (meaning lower than the instructor in question), then either the instructor had too rosy an idea of the student progress or the learning that was used for the rating was not sustained. On the other hand, if the successor instructors agreed with the higher ratings, then the course in question had a high impact on learning within that dimension. The trouble with reporting impacts, however, was what happens when a course has no impact? My solution was to get permission to report the impact results only to the instructor of the course in question. I was granted that permission and carried the problem to my next place of employment, Virginia Wesleyan College (VWC), where I was granted the same permission. Reporting such individual assessment results is basically the same problem for instructors as sharing assessment results on line is for programs.

The remaining steps for creating the impossible-to-discover-nothing design occurred at VWC. One of the things that attracted me to the college was that the faculty had very recently undergone a wholesale curriculum revision from five three-credit courses per term to four four-credit courses. For every course change proposed for this new 4-by-4 curriculum, faculty had to identify which of eleven "enhancements" (plus "other") would account for the additional credit hour. The third step emerged after a year of working toward LON assessment when a faculty committee identified that we could solve the problem of reporting course impacts by focusing instead on educational enhancement practices that were used across courses. We could calculate the impact of practices rather than the impact of courses. When a practice was used multiple times and found to have no impact, instructors would be much less defensive than if their courses were found to have no impact. They could keep the course and change the practice--exactly the kind of outcome Schechter sought.

However, a problem that engendered the final step became immediately apparent. Richard Bond, our Director of General Studies, had helped to create the original list of enhancements and criticized it as being mostly "seat-of-the-pants" and requiring a more careful look. George Kuh's (2008) eleven "high impact practices" were certainly interesting in this regard, but most of them

were in the list that the committee found unsatisfactorily abrupt. The solution was prompted by Robert Zemsky's (2013) sage advice in his *Checklist for Change*: "It is advantageous to disaggregate the traditional instructional format into a set of more or less discrete activities."

We in the assessment community have been disaggregating learning for decades, but few of us have systematically disaggregated instruction. We set about identifying six dimensions with five to nine elements of each: (1) social contexts, (2) locations, (3) instructor roles, (4) preparation strategies, (5) evaluations used, and (6) resources needed. Our faculty committee came up with a term "Course Design Survey" and helped to streamline the form for easy entry. The first set of figures at the end of this document show the three pages of the draft of our current Course Design Survey. Instructors identify which of 2 levels of emphasis (major or important) for each course design strategy. The result is millions of possible patterns of strategies – certainly better than eleven. We can look for high probability patterns of the elements across any or all of the programs in the college. Given the rich data that we get from our LONs, the odds of us discovering some approaches that work better than others are astronomically good.

The Course Design Survey leaves faculty free to design courses as they see fit and to change course designs from one term to the next. Given the power of the novelty effect in educational research, we should not expect that our solutions would often be permanent or universal. But the survey takes a minor fraction of an hour, and the LON ratings only one or two minutes per student. Both are small fractions of the time it takes to write a syllabus or to compile final grades. And the solutions should be useful not only to us, but to other institutions.

The key to public disclosure, as Schechter implied, is discovery. It needs to happen and we need to share it. Combining LONs with Course Design Surveys provides a powerful method for enhancing both.

Faculty members from programs, which had done especially complete work on their LON ratings this academic year, were asked to pilot the CDS. The Communication program faculty provided over 400 ratings this year, so analysis began with their data. Clustering of course design elements was based on 77 design submissions.

Analysis began with determining the similarity between two courses. This was done by assigning numbers to each of the affirmative answers and deciding whether to discriminate extent of usage. If not, a binary distribution results (0 for not checked and 1 for checked). If so, you will have a time-weighted distribution (0 for no mention, 0.25 for "Important", and 1 for "Major"). For most of us, the most familiar clustering methods involve the Pearson correlation which can be used with either distribution (with binary distributions it becomes the phi coefficient). Researchers will need to choose whether to include items that were not used in either course. Including them will tend to increase the correlation and since the list is not exhaustive, the increase is likely to be exaggerated.

Another clustering method is Keyword Network Deconstruction (KND) that I have written about in the AALHE Methodology Blog (<http://aalhe.org/blogs/methodology/text-analysis-tools>). This involves counting the number of co-occurring links<sup>2</sup>, averaging that number for all of the items, and then “deconstructing” the network by subtracting the same number from all the co-occurrences until the average is approximately one (co-occurrence per link). The final number of the subtraction is the “deconstruct number.” Then, sort the remaining practices by the maximum number of co-occurrences for each and then the first group becomes all the practices that co-occur with the one with the most links. Remove this group and reset the deconstruct number to a value that sets remaining average near one. Redo the process above for each group.

Using either way of clustering the course design practices (correlations or KND), meaningful names for each cluster need to be created. The final analysis step, then, begins with identifying the experience with the cluster of practices that each student has had in the courses taken within the program. This is absolutely essential to making sense of the data.

No educational practice exists in isolation. This truism often gets buried in the typical methodological approach of isolating a factor for study. But it is impossible to calculate the impact of a practice on learning in isolation from other practices. Experience with a cluster of educational practices can contribute to the acquisition of one LON level in each learning dimension in only 3 ways: advancing its appearance, delaying its appearance, or having no effect. This means that the general rate of progression becomes the expected value for the emergence of any learning outcome.

The last figure at the end of the paper shows the effects of one course design cluster on the nine learning outcomes dimensions of the Communication program at Virginia Wesleyan College. The Presentation cluster included Evaluation Basis – Presentation, Social Context – Other Group, Social Context – Small Student Group, Instructor Role – Facilitate Collaboration, and Preparation – Collaborate or Discuss. The charts on the left side of the figure show the influence of progressively greater use of the Presentation cluster while the right side is the progress of the students overall. Significance levels of the chi-squares comparing the left with the right data are shown in the chart titles (\*-0.05, \*\*-0.01, \*\*\*-0.001, etc.). The conclusion for the nine dimensions of learning is that “partial course use of the presentation cluster had large positive effects on Program Level performance for Research, Historical Context. That one course (in Public Speaking) produced program level performance in research and historical context suggests that early use of the presentation cluster could motivate development in other dimensions. The department's prior requests for enough staffing to make this a requirement is supported by this data. Possibly the significant effects on Public Communication and Film Style & Narration for partial course use of presentations could be connected to differences in

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<sup>2</sup> The co-occurrences can be readily modified to address the time-weighted approach simply by using counts of 0.25 instead of one for the courses that only have the practice used an “Important” amount of time.

interpretation involving beginning and easy definitions.” Thus, the Presentation cluster might effectively be used earlier as a small but important part of more courses at the early level and even to scaffold effects of other practice clusters like writing essays or reports and searching for information, analyzing data and integrating or synthesizing. The five other clusters had equally interesting results.

The writing cluster produced a contrasting outcome. In this case “the cluster mirrored the whole program well, reflecting the fact that Communication is a ‘Writing intensive department.’ The large number of Beginning ratings for Partial use in Public Communication is due to the assignment to write an outline for personal use during the presentation. Personal use is part of the definition of Beginning Public Communication.” The other four clusters produced equally distinct outcomes.

In general, the CDS shows that disaggregating course designs using a CDS generates an enormous number of possible relations between design elements and learning outcomes. Clustering the design elements makes it possible to identify practices that have unusual impacts on learning. But no practice exists in isolation. So called High Impact Practices only have high impacts relative to a rich background of other practices. It would take a truly radical and probably unnecessary educational experiment to determine if a particular high impact practice (like the one found here of using Presentations as parts of courses) would work in isolation. The CDS does for higher education assessment research what biodiversity methods do for ecology (c.f. Dornelas, et al., 2014): it provides a holistic overview of how the units of analysis co-occur.

Finally, the analysis of Course Design Survey and LON data can also identify low impact practices without posing a personnel evaluation threat to anyone using them. Armed with distinctions between what is working and what is not in a program, the faculty can use the results to propose changes designed to improve the program. These become inspiring assessment problems.

Dornelas, M., Gotelli, N.J., McGill, B. Shimadzu, H. Moyes, F, Sievers, C, and Magurra, A. E. (2014). Assemblage Time Series Reveal Biodiversity Change but Not Systematic Loss, *Science*, **344**, 296-299.

Kuh, George D. (2008). *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Zemsky, Robert. (2013). *Checklist for Change: Making American Higher Education a Sustainable Enterprise*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

## Course Design Survey-AALHE

Data from this Course Design Survey will greatly improve the "use of assessment results." Coupled with results from the Learning Outcome Network (LON), it will show what practices are having the most impact and it can do so without identifying individual faculty members.

Questions 3-5 on the next page refer to how you spent the instructional hours on the registration schedule. Question 6 and 7 on Page 3 refer to any time resources and preparation. The survey typically takes a few minutes per course. When you have finished each course that you taught in the last term, click "Done" and the screen will be ready for you to enter the next course. Please use the "Other" boxes to suggest options that should be added.

**\*1. Instructor email address prefix**

**\*2. Course Identifier (use Rubric Number as in ART 105)**

In items 3 through 7 below, please indicate whether the characteristic was a major or important part of the time the hours assigned to the course by the Registrar. Leave blank for activities that are minor or not on the syllabus. MAJOR is 4 or more weeks (normally 16 class periods). IMPORTANT is 1 to 4 weeks (4 to 15 class periods).

Next

+

## Course Design Survey-AALHE

### Page 2. Questions about Scheduled Class Time

#### 3. Social Contexts (Who will they interact with during class periods?)

	MAJOR (4+ wks)	IMPORTANT (1-4 wks)
No one	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instructor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Small student group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Whole class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other college group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other non-college group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (rate here; describe below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Description of other

#### 4. Locations for each instructional session (Where will classes be held?)

	MAJOR (4+ wks)	IMPORTANT (1-4 wks)
Classroom, lab, or studio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Library	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Off-campus (field or cultural event)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Off-campus (internship or service)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Travel inside USA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Travel outside USA	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (rate here; describe below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Description of other

#### 5. Instructor Roles for each instructional session (How do you plan to spend class periods?)

	MAJOR (4+ wks)	IMPORTANT (1-4 wks)
Present or lecture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Describe & critique methods use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facilitate collaborative learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Event or Travel Guide	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Internship or service advisor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (rate here; describe below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Description of other

Prev

Next

Rough estimates are OK. Over 30 hours or 1/4 of the time is MAJOR and over 12 hours or 1/10 of the time is IMPORTANT.

**6. Preparation (How are students supposed to spend their time preparing for class?)**

	MAJOR	IMPORTANT
Read and analyze text	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Write	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Analyze data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Synthesize and integrate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Search for information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Compose or design	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Practice skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborate or discuss	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (rate here; describe below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Description of other

**8. Resources (What resources must students use to be successful in the course?)**

	MAJOR	IMPORTANT
Assigned books	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Library research materials or databases	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Objects or materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Computers (incl internet)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Equipment or instruments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (rate here; describe below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Description of other

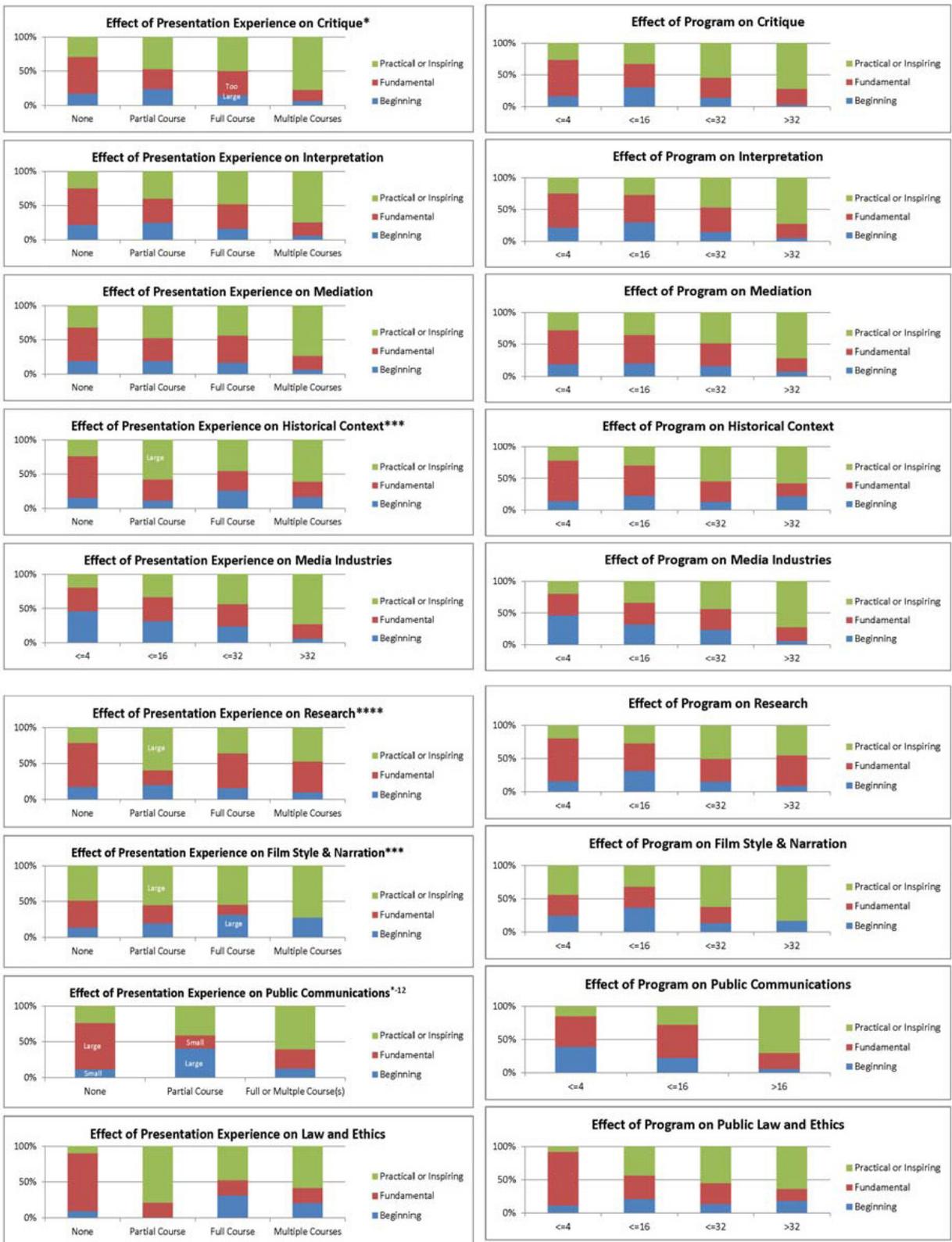
**7. Evaluation Basis**

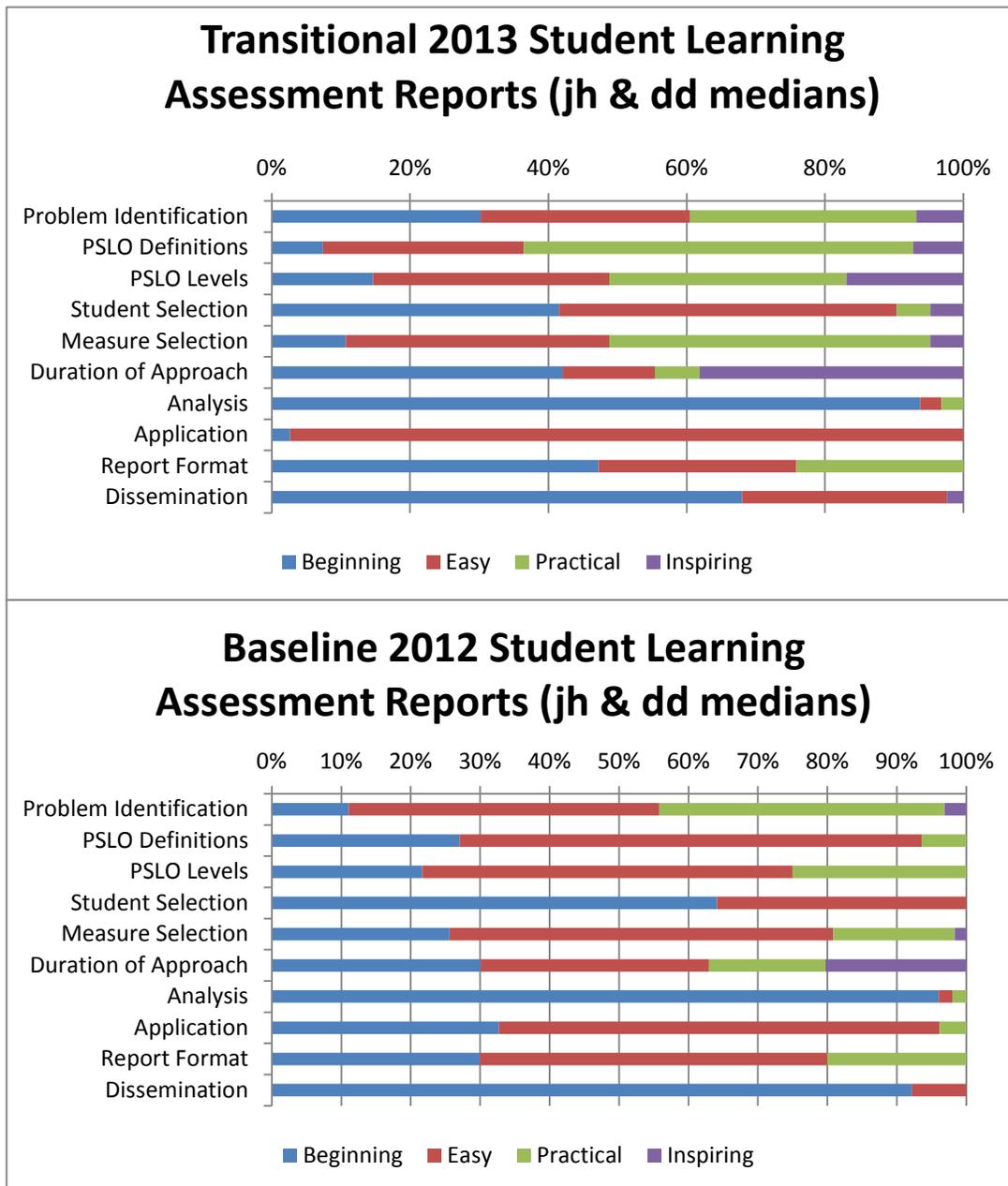
	MAJOR	IMPORTANT
Tests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Essays	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Presentations or performances	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Artworks or products	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multiple observations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Research or project report	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Class participation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (rate here; describe below)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Description of other

**9. Comments**

## Effects of Amount of Use of the Presentation Cluster on Nine Developmental Dimensions of Communication





**Figure 2. 2012 – 2013 Student Learning Assessment Report Comparisons.**

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# **Healthy Assessment: How nursing schools assess more effectively and less painfully**

Douglas J. Eder, Ph.D.  
deder@siue.edu

Emeritus at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville; formerly in university administration at Arizona State University, the University of North Florida and, most recently, as interim "assessment coach" at Purdue University.

## **ABSTRACT**

Faculties of nursing seem particularly adept at "doing" assessment, both for assuring student learning and sustaining accreditation. How do they achieve substantial effect with less fret than do faculties in other disciplines? Nationwide interviews of nursing schools revealed how they guide their assessment operations toward what matters most: student learning. They "close the loop" by systematically providing feedback for students, often via pathways independent of faculty mediation. Thus, assessment supplements faculty work by emphasizing that students are responsible for their own learning. This manuscript contributes to an emerging dialog by summarizing how nursing schools do it.

*Keywords:* Interviews, e-assessments, mastery learning, curricular mapping, alignment, feedback

## **INTRODUCTION**

During my nineteen years as a "pure" faculty member, and an overlapping fifteen more years of conversations with assessment scholars, I noticed that nursing schools seem to "do assessment" well and without much of the clamor that is common to other faculties. This impression grew when, as assessment steward at my own university, I attended assessment gatherings, read assessment publications, and visited approximately 140 other institutions for assessment purposes. From its beginnings as public policy in the 1980s, assessment has been widely viewed as a game of numbers that distracts professors from paying attention to what really matters: student learning and faculty research. Nevertheless, in the nursing discipline, there seems to be a health to assessment that less frequently surfaces elsewhere. I began to ask, "What insights do nursing faculties have about assessment that allow them to do it more quietly and *well*?"

## **METHODS**

Late last summer (2013), I interviewed nursing people who know about assessment (*e.g.*, nursing deans, associate deans, assessment coordinators). Interview subjects consisted of 19 nursing schools from across the US: large-small, public-private, 4-year and 2-year. Seven open-ended questions comprised the interviews, which took 15-20 minutes each. Multiple responses were permitted, followed by content analysis to categorize the responses. The list of participating institutions accompanies this article. The questions appear one-by-one below.

[Insert text box #1 near here.]

## FINDINGS

### 1. For whom do you do assessment? Why?

The response, "We do this for the students to assure that they are learning well," was unanimous...that is, it occurred in 100% of the interviews. It was the *first* reason mentioned in all but two of them. When faculty members in other disciplines, such as those in arts & sciences and business, received this question, they usually first said, "For the accreditor."

Additional nursing responses were:

For ourselves, our program, our university to assure that we are teaching well = 74%

For our accreditor = 58%

For the public and for the profession = 26%

*Remarks:* External accreditation affects many nursing school practices. Nevertheless, the linkage of nursing schools' assessment success to their reason for doing it ("for the students") is undeniable. Thus, nursing schools do assessment for reasons that actually matter to professors, namely, to improve student learning and produce graduates that become certified.

### 2. What do you assess?

The following components of student learning were reported as assessed:

Critical thinking/critical judgment = 95%

Communication skills = 53%

Disciplinary technical knowledge = 44%

Disciplinary skills = 44%

Levels of nursing essentials = 37%

Professionalism = 26%

Reflective thinking, science, aesthetics, leadership, evaluation of credible sources = 1 response each

Analytical skills = 21%

Diversity = 16%

Numeracy/graphing = 16%

Attitude = 16%

Ethics = 11%

Knowledge application = 11%

*Remarks:* Nursing schools reported that they assessed less on what matters to outsiders and more on what matters to *themselves*. Therefore, the highest priority went to assessing critical thinking and clinical judgment, and this matches what nursing faculties teach and what they expect students to learn. Assessment priorities followed pedagogical priorities.

### 3. How do you manage the information/data?

We do it by hand, we collect it ourselves, we use our own spreadsheets = 63%

We use course evaluations = 21%

We use electronic surveys and an internal software system = 16%

We receive assistance from a university software system = 11%

Via alumni surveys = 11%

#### 4. What kinds of assessment artifacts do you collect?

Exams = 95%	Concept maps = 21%
Simulator observations = 84%	Posters = 21%
Clinic observations = 63%	Capstone = 16%
Papers = 53%	Presentation = 16%
Standardized patients/nursing labs = 47%	Care plans = 16%
Portfolios = 26%	Case studies = 11%
	Journals = 11%

*Remarks:* The "by hand" descriptions in Question 3 were accompanied by qualifiers, such as: "We struggle with this," "painful," "we're limping along," "we're exploring for a good system and we're not there yet." Nevertheless, the artifacts that nursing schools assess -- see Question 4 -- are not unusual. The nursing emphasis on exams is high, but this is probably due to the requirement that nurses must pass licensing board exams. Viewed as a whole, the assessed artifacts suggest no items or data-management processes unique to nursing.

#### 5. How does feedback on student learning get back to the faculty/program so it can improve?

- By individual instructor reports to faculty, usually involving a self-improvement plan = 53%
- An established system of monthly or end-of-semester committee meetings = 47%
- Via written student, course, or site evaluations = 21%
- Through one main person = 11%
- Through larger institutional mechanisms = 5%
- Via e-portfolios = 5%

*Remarks:* One evident characteristic of nursing assessment was the regular discussion of assessment findings at faculty meetings --- no less often than once a semester, and at some institutions, every month. Corresponding curricular adjustments --including changes in classroom lectures and clinical contents -- occurred equally often. Frequent conversations and the wide availability of assessment results were reported to contribute to this nimble behavior. Even so, respondents frequently said, "Grappling with the data is difficult for us."

#### 6. How does feedback on student learning get back to the students themselves so they can improve?

- Students have direct, individual access to independent, electronic feedback systems = 63%
- Students receive individual feedback from professors = 47%
- Students serve on nursing school committees, receive information in group form = 44%
- Via published rubrics and individualized improvement plans = 26%
- Grades provide the feedback = 26%
- Only after the fact via exit, alumni, and employer surveys = 11%
- Newsletter or student orientation = 11%

*Remarks:* Two main pathways brought corrective feedback to students. One pathway was through classroom professors and clinical supervisors. Weekly conferences with groups of students were reported as common. The other pathway circumvented the faculty and typically involved an electronic system that grades multiple-choice exams. These e-assessment systems generally performed item analysis which, when combined with analytics, yielded feedback that was tailored to each individual student. E-assessments also provided corrective tutorial material dynamically programmed to match each student's needs --- followed by more practice exams and more feedback. Respondents in these interviews stated that nursing students are expected to use tutorials on their own...and those that did tended to outperform those that didn't. This advantage was not lost on students, most of who turned to using the feedback. Other academic disciplines generally do not use assessment this extensively or this deeply, nor do they explicitly expect students to acquire feedback independently.

## **7. Regardless of student grades, how do you use assessment to assure competence when students graduate and leave?**

Summation of multiple methods of assessment = 79%

Capstone or critical element or essential traits that must be shown as competent = 53%

Exit exam = 11%

There were three additional responses (paraphrased):

"We have a special day each week for discussing individual student competence" = 1

"We apply Bloom's taxonomy to analyze student competence" = 1

"There are licensed nurses in our program, and they have already been certified as competent" = 1

*Remarks:* In the same way that airplane pilots cannot merely be "good at landing an airplane 82% of the time," nursing schools cannot stand by while its students are less than 100% perfect at, say, calculating drug dosages, even though a grade of 82% is usually regarded as "more than adequate performance" in other disciplines. Mastery-learning is required in many areas, and two assessment approaches are used to monitor how nursing students get there. One approach is to triangulate results from several assessment methods that are used either sequentially or simultaneously. A second approach is to establish "essential elements" or "critical scenarios" ---such as drug dosage calculations and high intensity clinical simulations--- for which perfect performance is required before students advance to next stages. Perfect performance is important in nursing because, like the pilots landing airplanes, lives are on the line and "correct knowledge and procedure 82% of the time" is not good enough. Neither airline pilots nor nurses can become certified to practice their professions until they pass their respective board exams. According to respondents to these interviews, assessment feedback helps nursing students to learn to high criterion levels as well as to achieve high pass rates on board exams.

**8. Additional question specifically for users of software systems: How do you use e-assessment devices, such as ExamSoft, specifically to maintain the curriculum, improve student learning, and sustain or improve pass rates on certification exams?**

A one-word summary of responses to this question is "mapping." E-assessments, such as ExamSoft, ATI (Assessment Technologies Institute), and HESI (Health Education Systems, Inc.), permitted faculties to map student performance onto certification exam expectations, identify where adjustments were needed, and provide feedback so that students would know what they needed to improve. Nursing schools reported using results to assist in planning, for establishing a progression (*e.g.*, through Bloom's taxonomy) for student learning, and for gaining faculty buy-in for curriculum tuning and aligning. As a consequence, professors taught more effectively and students learned more deeply and quickly. E-assessments permitted individualized student e-tutoring and practice, usually without taking additional instructor's time (see responses and Remarks to Question #6 above).

## DISCUSSION

The nursing school interviews yielded at least seven lessons (labeled a - g below) that inform the practice of assessment in *any* academic discipline. The apparent success of nursing schools with assessment arose partly because (a) they aligned their assessments with what they wanted to accomplish, namely, assuring high levels of student learning --- and improving them. More than any other conclusion, this lesson about assessment is transferable to other disciplines that have high expectations for students. Additionally, (b) nursing faculties have had intentional and regularly scheduled conversations about curriculum and pedagogy, and these conversations have invoked assessment findings. When curricular areas that merited attention included priorities for student learning, (c) assessments turned to focus on those priorities. Items that were ranked as priorities were (d) things that mattered to the programs themselves and to the faculties in them, more so than what mattered only to outside agencies. This circumstance tended to embed assessment in teaching and learning and make it less of a bother.

Assessment inevitably implied (e) feedback to students so that they could improve, and (f) feedback to faculty members. The existence of these two feedback loops appears critical for nursing's success with assessment. Decisively, *students were expected to take advantage of assessment feedback as part of their own responsibility*. Benefits came more to those students who took advantage of the feedback; they came less to those who did not. Thus, assessment made teaching efforts more effective by obliging students to *engage* --- and when that happened, students learned better.

Successes aside, nursing schools reported that analyzing data by hand was difficult. (g) Some nursing schools saved faculty members' time and effort by using e-assessments such as ExamSoft, ATI, and HESI. Singly or in combination, e-assessments gave students targeted feedback that improved their learning while simultaneously improving professors' teaching efficiency and effectiveness --- *without adding to faculty effort*. A model exists here for other

disciplines to follow.

**[Text box #1]**

List of participants:

1. Blackhawk Technical College (Wisconsin)
2. SUNY Upstate University near Syracuse
3. Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing
4. Johnson County Community College
5. University of San Francisco
6. Michigan State University
7. Salish Kootenai College
8. Creighton University
9. Purdue University
10. Linfield College
11. University of Kentucky
12. Wichita State University
13. Abilene Christian University
14. New Mexico State University
15. East Tennessee State University
16. Stephen F. Austin State University
17. Laramie County Community College
18. Texas State Technical College of Nursing
19. Oklahoma State University - Oklahoma City

RECOMMENDED READING

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## **Authentic Assessment of Liberal Education Outcomes in Two and Four Year-Degrees**

Michael E. Gress  
Director of Institutional Effectiveness  
mgress@vinu.edu  
Vincennes University

Larry R. Peterson,  
Director of Accreditation Assessment and Academic Advising  
Larry.R.Peterson@ndsu.edu  
North Dakota State University

Robert W. Strong  
Associate Professor and Associate Dean of University Programs  
bobs@stedwards.edu  
St. Edwards University

### Abstract

In September 2010, the Association for General and Liberal Studies (AGLS) coordinated faculty from nine demographically and educationally diverse higher education institutions in a two-year project to identify, document, and evaluate assessment of student learning at the about-to-graduate levels of liberal learning. Assisted by a Lumina Foundation Grant, they focused on authentic assessment of graduates' best work in liberal education for both the AA/AS and the BA. The guiding question was "What assessments are *worthy of our missions*?" Three themes emerged: the necessity of developing faculty ownership of assessment activities; the value of capstone assessment in general education (GE) capstones for validating institutional mission success; and, the power of professional program capstone assessment for increasing faculty ownership of GE goals while allowing faculty autonomy. Representatives from Portland State University, Miami Dade College, and Vincennes University describe faculty ownership (and the conditions for ownership) as a requirement for useful and authentic assessment. Saint Joseph's College and St. Edward's University faculty discuss their use of capstone assessments to evaluate the impact of their mission-driven curricula, which emphasize intellectual skills designed to develop the student as a whole person and lifelong learner. Representatives from the University of Saint-Francis, the University of North Dakota, North Dakota State University, and Champlain College describe how authentic assessment of GE outcomes in discipline-specific capstones can be ideal for campuses with a significant proportion of professional programs; the assessment activities can bridge specialized training and GE.

*Keywords:* general education, capstone, summative assessment, culture of assessment, Association for General and Liberal Studies

In September 2010, the Association for General and Liberal Studies (AGLS) coordinated faculty from nine demographically and educationally diverse higher education institutions in a two-year project to identify, document, and evaluate assessment of student learning at the about-to-graduate levels of liberal learning. Assisted by a Lumina Foundation Grant, they focused on

authentic assessment of graduates' best work in liberal education for both the AA/AS and the BA. The guiding question was "What assessments are *worthy of our missions*?"

Three themes emerged: the necessity of developing faculty ownership of assessment activities; the value of capstone assessment in general education (GE) capstones for validating institutional mission success; and, the power of professional program capstone assessment for increasing faculty ownership of GE goals while allowing faculty autonomy.

## Ensuring Faculty Ownership in GE

Representatives from Portland State University, Miami Dade College, and Vincennes University considered what community college assessment might reveal about student preparation for work and transfer; the focus evolved into a discussion about faculty ownership as a requirement for useful and authentic assessment. For assessment to fulfill the needs of higher education, accreditors, administration, and most importantly, students and their learning, faculty have to own the process and invest in it. Three conditions for ownership and investment are faculty engaging as classroom teachers; their being supported and supportive at the departmental, programmatic, and institutional level; and their embracing a learning conversation that goes beyond assessment data. Case studies from the three institutions present examples of these necessary conditions.

At Portland State, faculty are challenged with assessing a Senior Capstone in which students, working in interdisciplinary teams, do community projects. Ensuring faculty engagement is crucial for meeting course design and instructional challenges. The Capstone Director invites faculty recognized as ready for the challenges. Seasoned Capstone faculty mentor the new faculty through the development process. Twice-yearly Capstone Retreats and monthly brownbag lunches offer faculty support, and a small group instructional diagnosis activity is used to provide midterm formative feedback. Finally, an end-of-term e-portfolio provides valuable information on the course and program levels that stimulates institution-wide pedagogical discussions and engages new faculty in the process.

Miami Dade faculty are supported in and supportive of the assessment process. Miami Dade assesses more than 170,000 students taught by over 800 full-time faculty and 1800 adjuncts. The institution's commitment to faculty owning assessment requires encouraging faculty control in various ways, including two 30-member assessment committees and faculty serving as campus liaisons, peer facilitators, and learning outcomes ambassadors. The institution supports multiple assessment administrators offering professional development in face-to-face, online, and webinar formats. Professional development assessment results led to Peer Facilitation Workshops. The Campus Dialogue allows faculty to share ideas on assessment and learning strategies. Additionally, the institution includes assessment in the strategic planning and supports faculty-staff participation in nationwide assessment conversations.

The Vincennes University English Department recognized the importance of steering the assessment discussion toward internal, values-focused dialogues about learning improvement. A stalled, accountability-focused assessment effort required the faculty to re-envision assessment. Workshop activities using student artifacts elicited agreement on shared composition values,

composition outcomes, and assignment basics. This initial success with composition courses inspired the faculty to identify common literature outcomes and a complementary synthesis assignment designed to prepare students for successful transfer. The dialogues shifted assessment from data collection to rubric-building, defining the faculty's goals for student learning while leaving room for individual assignment design. The faculty recognized learning as a messy process requiring risk and collaboration that grows out of shared values, not data.

For many faculty and staff, assessment remains a coldly impersonal external mandate for evidence that justifies accreditation and political needs. The Portland State, Miami Dade, and Vincennes' stories represent a growing number of programs and institutions that see assessment as an institutionally supported, essential component of the academic process working most effectively when it grows out of a supportive dialogue and activities that increase the intentionality of instruction.

### GE Capstones

Saint Joseph's College in Indiana, and St. Edward's University in Texas, are private, Catholic, liberal arts institutions which conduct senior-level assessment in GE capstones. Four-year GE curricula of required, interdisciplinary, core courses serve as a pathway to these capstones.

Institutional missions emphasizing intellectual skills designed to develop the student as a whole person and lifelong learner are essential to both capstones. These capstones evaluate students' written and oral communication skills, information literacy and research skills, moral reasoning and value formation, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary and synthesizing skills, emphasizing an international perspective encouraging students to attend to historical and current controversies of the world, while assisting students in assuming leadership roles in transforming it. Faculty utilize common rubrics ensuring mission-derived skills are assessed and participate in norming exercises promoting comparable rubrics usage and increased collected data accuracy.

Each institution's specific capstone aligns with its institutional mission. Saint Joseph's two-part capstone embodies the core curriculum's integrative and interdisciplinary commitments. During Fall, senior students craft manifestos of their fundamental beliefs about the world, people, and God, identifying fundamental values to which they will appeal in making decisions. In Spring, students research a contemporary issue making a written and oral presentation on the stance taken on the issue—a stance guided by their manifesto.

In St. Edward's capstone, students investigate a policy-based controversy. Students research thoroughly, analyzing the argumentation and moral reasoning of stakeholders, and propose a principle-based solution. They interview experts and conduct civic engagement activities. Research results are presented in written and oral presentations.

Being mission-driven is the primary strength of the GE capstones. The courses provide opportunities to deliver the mission and to assess that delivery. A second strength of these capstones is highlighted in the Pathway→Compass→Community structure. Students follow a core curriculum pathway→guided by a capstone compass→this common program builds

community. With common goals and shared experiences, students and faculty are able to form a true *collegio*, offering signature forms of undergraduate education: At Saint Joseph's, students are expected to make an ethical commitment; St. Edward's requires problem solving and civic engagement components. Ethical engagement helps students apply their education to a diverse world, often constituting a life-changing event.

These faculties recognize assessment and programmatic factors as vital to a GE capstone. Rubrics gather data that is reviewed and used. Since these capstones are cumulative, student preparation is crucial. Both schools revised the GE pathway preceding the capstone to ensure key skills (i.e., moral reasoning and oral communication), are addressed before students enter capstone. Faculty development is essential since GE capstones call for interdisciplinary approaches and most faculty are trained for proficiency in discipline-specific fields. Orientation sessions, peer mentoring, course-material archives, and workshops ensure the capstone instructors are prepared to assess students' integration of diverse knowledge.

GE capstones serve as compasses for liberal education and student learning. Four year Core curricula provide a pathway toward student success in the capstone, with rubrics measuring essential mission-related outcomes for students.

#### Assessing GE in Disciplinary Capstones

Assessing GE outcomes in disciplinary capstones works well for campuses with professional programs. Because these capstones target future careers, students can be highly motivated to produce their best work. Four of the nine AGLS institutions have discipline-specific capstones: the University of Saint-Francis (USF), Indiana; the University of North Dakota (UND); North Dakota State University (NDSU); and Champlain College, Vermont.

When assessing GE outcomes via discipline-based capstones, campuses should agree on the degree of department autonomy in three areas: outcomes assessed; guidelines for student work; and evaluation procedures.

Assessing common outcomes provides a comprehensive portrait of key learning; however, greater faculty choice may encourage ownership. Both USF and Champlain assess specified GE outcomes with student capstone work, whereas UND faculty must choose two of the campus' four GE outcomes. NDSU instructors assess department-based outcomes.

Student work guidelines maximize cross-section comparability, minimizing faculty autonomy. USF, NDSU, and UND faculty design their own capstone assignments; Champlain instructors adapt two assignments with common prompts.

Evaluation procedures clearly link to autonomy. NDSU faculty have more autonomy because individual instructors assess student learning for departmental assessment reports. USF faculty select student products to assess with a common rubric in a week-long workshop. Faculty at Champlain and UND employ both within-course and cross-institutional evaluation. For within-course assessment, Champlain instructors use a shared rubric, assessing the two common assignments students submit in electronic portfolios. Champlain utilizes cross-institutional

scoring formatively, testing new rubrics, increasing faculty understanding of assessment, and identifying assessment practices needing improvement. UND's GE course validation uses within-course scoring wherein faculty report evidence of student achievement. Additionally, UND gathers samples of capstone student work for single-day scoring workshops, focusing on different learning outcomes annually.

Authentically assessing GE outcomes in discipline-specific capstones can be ideal for campuses with a significant proportion of professional programs because they can bridge specialized training and GE.

#### Conclusion

Despite great variation in creating and implementing capstones at institutions with a wide range of sizes and missions, the AGLS capstone project revealed how and why campuses can create authentic summative assessments for liberal learning outcomes—assessments that are “*worthy of our missions.*”

## **Engaging Faculty to Develop and Implement Meaningful Assessments of Institutional Outcomes**

Joan Hawthorne  
joan.hawthorne@email.und.edu

Anne Kelsch  
anne.kelsch@email.und.edu

### **Abstract**

Assessment for program improvement is meaningful to the degree that it engages faculty in the process and findings. Senior Assessment Week was conceived as a means of engaging our faculty in (1) planning an assessment strategy, (2) creating assessment tasks that are intrinsically motivational for students, (3) supervising and carrying out the assessment process, and, after the semester ends, (4) scoring the student work products and determining the meaning of findings.

Using the concept of “performance tasks” modeled on those pioneered by the CLA and since adapted on many campuses for use in classroom instruction and assessment, faculty were invited to participate in all of these steps as part of a campus assessment of two common (but challenging to assess) general education outcomes: quantitative reasoning and oral communication. Students were contacted through capstone classes and asked by their faculty to volunteer to participate in the assessment, a recruiting strategy that proved successful. The assessments were conducted through our learning management system, using faculty proctors drawn from relevant campus committees; faculty volunteers will score – as has occurred previously using other kinds of student work products.

Although 2014 was a pilot year for Senior Assessment Week, it has already proved to be a strategy that can be used to address a number of common challenges in general education assessment. Most important, faculty own the process from beginning to end. This allows the strategy to be adaptable to general education learning outcomes and to represent campus and faculty values.

**Keywords:** assessment, general education, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, capstones, scoring sessions

Faculty involvement in assessment of the programs in which they teach is crucial: only faculty are in a position to make changes in what and how students learn. They control both overarching curriculum and day-to-day pedagogy. As the first of five key factors to consider when planning effective assessments, Banta, Jones, and Black (2009) cite “engaging stakeholders” (p. 1), and faculty are surely among the most key. “Connecting assessment to valued goals and processes” comes second.

As obvious as the need for faculty engagement in assessment may be, achieving it remains a challenge. Connecting to valued goals and processes is similarly critical but equally complex. Nowhere are these challenges more evident than in the assessment of general education (GE), a program which while owned, in a real sense, by the faculty at large, can easily

suffer from deep faculty disengagement (Rhodes, 2010). If faculty feel “disenfranchised” in their ownership of the GE curriculum, as is often the case (Gano-Phillips & Barnett, 2010, p. 16), they may be even more likely to be disengaged from its oversight and assessment processes. And yet assessment of GE that does not resonate with and engage faculty, both in its concept and its results, will not fulfill an institution’s need for meaningful program oversight and improvement.

### **Developing the Assessment Week Concept**

The concept of “Senior Assessment Week” was born to address that need. We had already established a tradition of annual scoring sessions held in May, after completion of finals. Previous scoring sessions had used work products generated in GE capstone courses. With learning outcomes like written communication, critical thinking, and information literacy, artifact collection had been straightforward. Faculty teaching those capstones (or, prior to the implementation of a capstone requirement, faculty teaching senior level courses in various disciplines across campus) had been requested to submit sample student papers that were expected to demonstrate that outcome.

Scoring for the diversity outcome had presented a greater challenge since it was less consistently addressed in capstone assignments. It was possible, however, to collect work products from GE courses designated as emphasizing that outcome. Although these diversity courses were often taken in students’ first or second years of college, we recognized that, for many students, this represented their last substantive academic experience designed to provide an opportunity to think about diversity conceptually. Still, the lower division context meant that we were unable to capture growth that might occur through non-course-based learning such as students’ experiences in various organizations and work environments or their informal but purposeful interactions with peers and faculty.

Faced with the need to assess the GE outcomes of oral communication and quantitative reasoning, the obstacles became even more difficult to surmount. Although a number of GE courses emphasized quantitative reasoning, assignment format varied considerably. One teacher might be assessing quantitative reasoning skills via problem sets, another by multiple choice tests, a third by an essay exam or paper. Many of those work products would be highly discipline-specific and not easily scored by faculty from across campus. With oral communication, the challenge would be in capturing the work itself. Although many capstones require students to make presentations, few faculty were collecting those presentations in some kind of video format. Those who did might be using any of a number of technologies to do so. How could such outcomes be collaboratively scored to determine overall level of student achievement?

The concept of Senior Assessment Week provoked a reconsideration of work products. Rather than score products generated in capstones, we chose to recruit students from capstones but ask them to generate work products outside of class. The key would be using assessments flexible enough to address our specific GE goals, but designed to be sufficiently engaging so that students would be motivated to complete them thoroughly and thoughtfully. One assessment format stood out as appropriate for this need.

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) has pioneered use of what are commonly called “performance tasks” as tools for assessment of a limited pool of GE skills, most notably critical and analytical thinking and written communication. Participants in the CLA Academy program (offered through the Council for Aid to Education, the organization that developed the CLA) learn strategies for adapting that concept for use as a teaching and an assessment tool in their own classes and programs, focusing on whatever complex skills might be relevant both to academic work and real-world scenarios. Performance tasks, we believed, could be developed to assess student achievement of oral communication and quantitative reasoning. We had the added advantage of having some faculty on campus who were already familiar with the format and had developed performance tasks for use in their courses.

The principle behind performance tasks is that students are asked to assume a role or persona that is recognizable as plausibly authentic. Each performance task includes a scenario which describes the role and specifies the task. The task also includes a document library with appropriate memos, reports, newspaper articles, webpages, or other resources. These documents may be real (although perhaps condensed), but they should feel real even if invented for the task. In addition, students are provided with a scoring rubric that helps them understand the criteria against which their work will be measured.

### **Carrying Out the Assessment Week Pilot**

Recognizing the key faculty development need to engage faculty in this effort and allow them to both develop and own GE assessments, we convened a faculty team to engage in planning. Comprised primarily of faculty teaching capstone courses, the team quickly concluded that the concept was viable. Dividing into interdisciplinary groups focused on oral communication and quantitative reasoning and designating smaller work groups to carry out initial task development, faculty teams developed performance tasks, including document libraries. Group leaders reported participants found the collaboration in task development very engaging. Technical staff created a delivery mechanism and a means of collecting student work products (especially critical for the oral communication outcome) via our learning management system.

In parallel, we asked capstone faculty to assist with student recruitment. Some offered extra credit for participation or explained the concept and requested student cooperation. Others invited an Assessment Week spokesperson (the GE program director or the assessment director) to pitch the idea to their class.

As teams were developing performance tasks and students were being invited to participate, we began recruitment of faculty proctors and identification of rooms suitable for the assessment processes. Members of the campus assessment committee, the GE committee, and the teams that had convened to develop the Assessment Week concept were asked to volunteer. A detailed instruction sheet allowed them to administer the online assessment without special training. Support staff ensured that room set-ups enabled the sessions to occur as planned and they remained “on call” to address technical issues. Online students were also able to participate in the assessments, completing the same tasks (although on a somewhat different time schedule) as on-campus students.

## Lessons Learned for Next Time

Although heavily pressured by time, the efforts to carry out our initial Assessment Week in 2014 were successful; students created work products in response to the faculty-designed performance tasks, and those products will be scored during a campus-wide scoring session similar to those conducted with capstone work products in earlier years. Lessons learned from this year's experience will be applied going forward as we assess other GE goals (see Appendix A for information on steps in carrying out Assessment Week planning in future years).

To ensure smoother implementation in future years, faculty assigned to capstone courses will be reminded significantly in advance – before syllabi are even developed – that their help in recruiting student participants is crucial. Sharing the positive feedback we received from students who found the assessments interesting and engaging will help. Faculty will also be invited to participate in the development of additional tasks, applicable to our other GE outcomes, or to revise and improve the existing tasks based on what we learn during scoring. In view of the complexity of scheduling, assessment times and locations will be determined prior to the semester's start.

Early in the 2014-15 academic year, faculty will receive a report on the activities and findings of Assessment Week, summarizing the concept, implementation, tasks, and scoring results. Presentations and discussion of both the concept and the results will allow us to learn from our findings, as well as provide insights that will enable us to conduct assessment activities with even greater success in future iterations. We also hope to find that some faculty who worked on the development or scoring of the tasks have adopted this assessment approach in their own courses and programs, thus perhaps closing the loop – for both GE and assessment itself – through changes at the level of their own classrooms.

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## Appendix A

### **Checklist of Steps for Carrying out an Assessment Week using Performance Tasks**

- Hold planning sessions that include those responsible for assessment, general education oversight, and campus technology.
- Set dates when assessments will be held
- Notify faculty through whom student recruiting will occur of assessment dates. Request their assistance in recruiting students through one or more possible methods (include in syllabus, build it in as a class expectation or extra credit experience, encourage in conversations with their students, etc.).
- Locate appropriate spaces and make room reservations.
- Convene ad hoc interdisciplinary faculty committees to create performance tasks that will be appropriate to the outcome and sufficiently motivational to encourage student effort.
- Ensure tasks align with rubrics to be used for scoring – or have rubrics developed (or adapted) in conjunction with performance task development.
- Pilot tasks with student volunteers who are willing to read and critique.
- Recruit Assessment Week proctors.
- Develop training materials for proctors, in conjunction with technology staff (if assessments will be completed online).
- Develop plans for making student work products anonymous (to the degree possible).
- Plan and hold a scoring session during which work products collected can be normed, scored, and, at the conclusion of the session, the entire process can be debriefed and needed revisions to tasks, rubrics, processes, and/or curriculum can be discussed.
- Disseminate findings and process summary to campus.

## **Creating Order out of Chaos – Moving to a Common Assessment Plan**

Presenters: Melissa Helvey  
Associate Director of Programmatic Assessment  
mhelvey@ncu.edu

Dr. Renee Aitken  
School of Education Director of Assessment  
raitken@ncu.edu>

Northcentral University

### **Introduction**

The proliferation of online and for-profit institutes of higher learning has ushered in a new era of intense scrutiny. Institutions are now expected to demonstrate exactly what students are learning, and whether the intended curriculum has been successfully delivered. It's not a giant leap to understand even the smallest errors in application or implementation of a rigorous assessment protocol can have damaging consequences. Therefore, accuracy isn't a high enough threshold for assessment management; only precision will do.

### **Northcentral University**

Northcentral University (NCU) was founded in 1996, specializing in on-line graduate degrees to working professionals over the age of 30. NCU is regionally accredited through the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). NCU serves almost 10,000 students in four academic schools – the School of Education, the School of Business and Technology Management, the School of Psychology and the School of Marriage and Family Sciences. The four schools have diverse school-specific accrediting bodies as well, such as TEAC, AACSB and COAMFTE, to name a few.

### **Planning a Holistic Assessment Process**

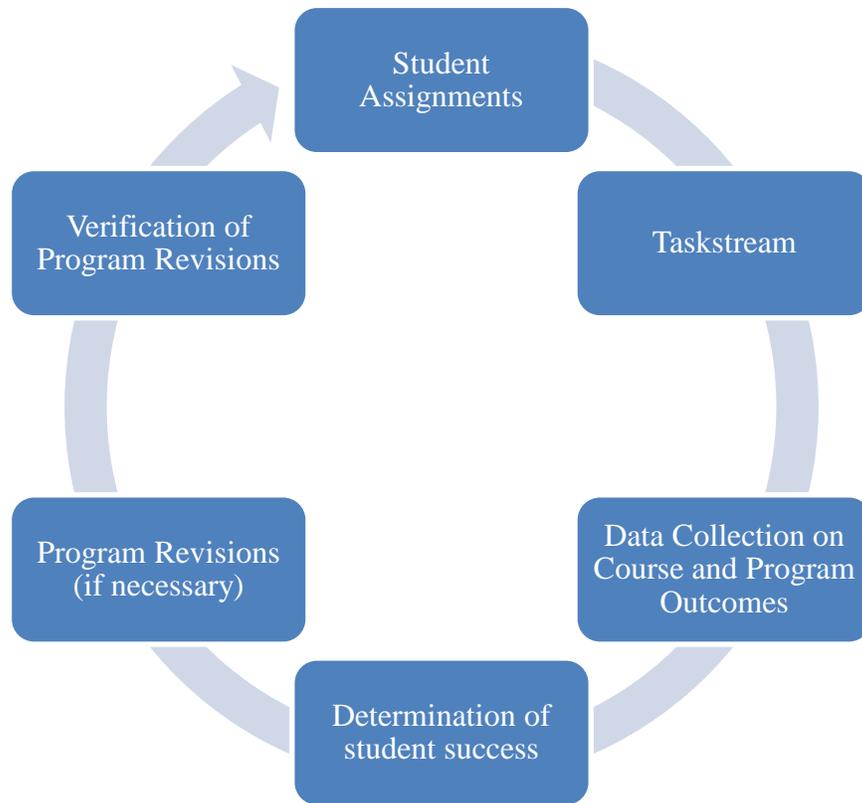
Assessment literature is abundantly available in academic journals because of its importance to society. From the accreditation bodies who assure institutions of higher education are achieving their missions to government officials to students who are paying for their degree; it seems everyone wants to know if students are achieving the goals as promised by the institution. As an institution with a variety of disciplines and a strong desire to implement an effective assessment process, it was essential for Northcentral to consider first what elements and literature would help support creating a culture of assessment. Drawing from an intensive literature review, NCU created a team with a mission to implement a consistent programmatic assessment process. Taking from work done in 1992 by Dunphy & Stace, NCU leadership recognized the need for specific leadership for the change. In addition, the leadership recognized the need for structure and a support system (Duck, Hamilton, & Robb, 2011). They also understood the importance of developing policy and tasked the team with developing written processes and policy development as they implemented the assessment system (Smith, 2012).

The team assigned to develop processes and policies for programmatic assessment consisted of a Senior Director and an Assistant Programmatic Director to lead the team along with an Assessment Director from each of the four NCU Schools. The direction set by the Provost included a time limitation (90 days to first implementation), documentation of processes and policies, and a requirement to assure all assessments used similar scales. These broad, overarching directions afforded the newly formed team the opportunity to collaborate through investigation and discussion without much hindrance.

The team was implemented in April 2013 with the expected start of assessment data to be September 2013. Although the original timeline was 90 days, the team convinced the Provost to push the date out to 90 days after the purchase and training on an assessment management system. One of the Assessment Directors had been part of the investigation into a proprietary, home grown electronic assessment system, which in January 2013 had concluded the purchase of a commercial assessment system was a more beneficial and viable option. To verify the viability of the system and to support faculty driven decisions while garnering support for an overall institutional assessment process, several systems were demonstrated and tested with faculty participants from all schools (Carless, 2009).

The negotiations with Taskstream, the chosen system, were still proceeding when the assessment team was formed. Understanding the value of a system already successful in implementing many assessment processes provided the Assessment Team with a strong structure; essential in building an assessment process (Banta, Jones,& Black, 2009).

The team then determined the need to research, define, and develop an assessment philosophy to support their visions of assessment. The figure below represents the team process for assessment:



## Student Learning

Student learning is the structure upon which teaching is built (Kearns, 2012). Providing evidence students are successfully achieving their academic goals as intended is critical to institutional success. The penalty for substandard student success is loss of accreditation, student financial aid, and legitimacy. These penalties are detrimental to any institution of higher learning (Rivard, 2013).

Learning outcomes provide the means to demonstrate and map student learning. At the broadest level are Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs). ILOs are typically outcomes all schools or programs, independent of their specific discipline or academic level, can demonstrate. Examples of ILOs may be critical thinking, writing, or research. Students, regardless of their status in a program, should be evaluated on the ILOs, with those newer to an academic program demonstrating less proficiency than more progressed students. For example, a student pursuing their Bachelor's degree would intuitively show less proficiency on a measurable ILO than a student pursuing their PhD.

Programmatic Learning Outcomes (PLOs) represent outcomes specific to an academic program. PLOs map up to ILOs and map down to Course Learning Outcomes (discussed below). PLOs are not as broad as ILOs, but also not specific to the course (CLOs). PLOs are applicable across an academic program. Some examples of PLOs are: "Accurately integrate multiple

perspectives related to diversity,” “Effectively use technology” and “Discuss methods of collaboration to build and execute a shared vision.” A specific PLO may be assessed periodically throughout student progression, and the student should demonstrate a burgeoning comprehension and proficiency in application of the PLO in their academic program.

Of the three levels of learning outcomes, the Course Level Outcomes (CLOs) are the most specific and applicable to the course. CLOs map up to the PLOs and ILOs, and may contain course specific goals, such as “writing a business plan,” or “demonstrate the difference between Freudian and Cognitive Behaviorist viewpoints on therapy.” CLOs are assessed throughout the course, but may not be directly assessed again within the academic program.

### **Programmatic Learning Assessment**

Instituting potential revision into a program and curriculum requires essential knowledge of how students are performing relative to their PLOs. This information will demonstrate if change should be implemented (program level) and where (course level).

Implementation of a universal, across-school assessment management plan at the programmatic level was essential for NCU. In September of 2012, NCU began assessing PLOs in an on-line assessment management tool, Taskstream.

Taskstream allows faculty to assess student learning through the use of rubrics, specifically designed by subject matter experts (SMEs). SMEs (faculty, assessment and curriculum directors) created the rubrics based on the requirements of the course and the PLOs used to evaluate their progression. Across and between school collaboration was essential, resulting in comprehensive, measurable and reliable student assessment, which provided accurate results to initiate programmatic change.

### **Engagement of All Constituents**

Assessment Directors worked with school faculty in the selection of assignments as well as determining the programmatic outcomes to use for assessment of student learning.

Obstacles were plentiful and the learning curve high. The majority of the Assessment Directors and faculty were novices to assessment management tools (such as Taskstream). In addition, many had little if any experience in creating and using rubrics to assess student learning. The Assessment Directors needed to become experienced with the tools and data used to demonstrate outcomes.

The Assessment Directors worked collaboratively and assisted one another with all components of the initiative, from establishing the programs in Taskstream to the creation of rubrics. Those who were experts in one area, such as rubric creation, championed and educated those who were less seasoned. The teamwork involved is indicative of the composition of the NCU ecosystem. It was truly a collaborative process.

## Outcomes from Assessment

Through cross-school collaboration, all schools met the 90-day deadline and started collecting data. In less than a year, NCU integrated all academic programs throughout the four schools, and have over 4,000 students participating in Taskstream.

One of our schools (the School of Education) has already used assessment data to make substantive changes to one of their programs. The other schools are reviewing data and determining next steps relative to possible curriculum and programmatic change.

## Next Steps

Notwithstanding analyzing student data and continuing to make programmatic improvement as shown in the cycle above, the NCU Assessment Team will be implementing an assessment initiative of the Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) in the next round of assessment development.

NCU has four outcomes, and plans on beginning assessment of two currently (critical thinking and written communication). The assessment data will demonstrate whether students are meeting the broader goals relative to NCU and if not, help determine the changes needed to curriculum and programs to ensure students graduate with mastery of these goals.

## In Summary

Ultimately, the rapid adoption of an assessment tool and best practices ensured students are the focus of education. Failed student outcomes, reputational damage, and jeopardized accreditation are not reasonable outcomes given the tools, resources, and collective knowledge of assessment professionals working together in a cohesive ecosystem. NCU has achieved, through cooperation and an understanding of assessment, building a comprehensive assessment strategy within a limited time. This achievement demonstrates how working together as a cohesive team provided exponential success for NCU.

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## Assessment in Creative Disciplines: Quantifying and Qualifying the Aesthetic

J. Joseph Hoey IV  
joseph.hoey@bpiedu.com

David Mills Chase  
dmillschase@gmail.com

Jill L. Ferguson  
jill@jillferguson.com

**Abstract:** Assessment at Creative Institutions: Quantifying and Qualifying the Aesthetic is based on a book by the same name (Common Ground, 2014) that explores creativity and its assessment using easy-to-grasp concepts, concrete examples, and case studies to form a variety of blueprints that educators and students can use to assess endeavors in music, art, and design on an individual basis and as a collective (course, cohort, department, or program). Metacognition, self-regulation, and analysis of performance are essential features of learning in the arts, and higher order synthesis and integration of knowledge and skill into creative expression is a natural outcome of the process. Yet despite the prevalence of direct evidence of learning as a natural part of art making, arts disciplines have been hesitant to engage in systematic assessment of student learning.

*Assessment at Creative Institutions: Quantifying and Qualifying the Aesthetic* grew out of the research and writings (of authors such as Allen, Diamond, Suskie, Walvoord, Angelo, Cross, Banta, and Cunliffe) and presentations of the authors David Mills Chase, Vice Dean, Academic Affairs, American Film Institute Conservatory; Jill L. Ferguson, former Assessment Coordinator and Chair of General Education at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and former Chief of Staff at the Western Association of Schools and Colleges; and J. Joseph Hoey IV, VP of Accreditation Relations and Policy at Bridgepoint Education and former VP for Institutional Effectiveness at Savannah College of Art and Design—all faculty and administrators with years of experience in music and arts education and assessment.

Education, in the United States and throughout the world, is at a critical juncture. As costs rise and rates of retention and graduation fall government agencies, parents, and the public are calling for more accountability. Employers want to know the meaning behind a diploma that says someone has been awarded a degree and what it signifies beyond a mere collection of credit hours or an accumulation of courses completed. What is that person capable of doing? What skill sets have been acquired and at what level is the person proficient? Educators have been called upon to assess student learning and to explain that a degree is not just a sum of its sometimes seemingly disparate parts but rather a cohesive set experiences, competencies, and values that taken together form a meaningful whole.

Arts and design disciplines have a natural advantage in terms of outcomes assessment in that the products, performances, and artifacts students create can be observed, recorded, and visually represented – and thus can be used as a representation of student creative ability.

Equally important to assess, but much less visible, is the attitudinal development of the student as a reflective, self-critiquing creative professional as well as the interior generative process by which an artist arrives at a performance or by which s/he produces a design or work of art. We feel strongly that all aspects must be included for an arts and design assessment framework to be of practical value to the disciplines, since all three are essential components of the degree-prepared creative professional.

While natural advantages accrue to creative disciplines in terms of learning outcomes assessment, several problems have proven especially divisive and limiting to the understanding and practice of assessment in creative disciplines. The first issue of consequence concerns questions around the appropriate unit of analysis for assessment. Most higher education schemas rely exclusively on group-level assessment of student learning to ensure norms of validity and reliability (concepts themselves that are an artifact of what we refer to as the scientific method); whereas, the tradition in studio-based disciplines is to rely upon individual assessment of student work by one or more artist educators.

A second problem with assessment in arts and design has to do with the basic philosophy of arts and evaluation of artistic merit – that is, the apparent conflict between the romantic view of the artist as being in some sense divinely inspired and the more sociological and anthropological viewpoint of the artist as existing within a set of situations and environments that decisively influence the artist's ability to create. Authors such as Cunliffe (2007, 2008a, 2012) have dealt with this problem at length.

A third and very deep problem in assessment has to do with the basis upon which judgments of competency should be rendered, how they should be rendered, and by whom. An unfortunate reaction of the higher education arts and design community in the United States to primitive, purely quantitative and 'fill in the box' approaches to assessment was to build an entrenched defense of a posture to assessment we might call the 'great artist' theory. Under this notion, only great artists are able to render judgments of artistic merit and competency. While acknowledging the value of having highly-trained and talented individuals assess student competence, we also believe assessment must include a broader array of alternatives to traditional arts assessment that facilitate common dialogue among faculty, students, and other stakeholders around student competencies, including practicing professionals and employers.

Related to the previous problem is a fourth, and on its surface an especially troubling issue – that of the perceived reductionism of assessment. As creative professionals, we naturally react strongly to any schema that does not allow for the consideration of an artistic, performance, or design work as a whole. Adhering blindly to a simple set of learning outcomes without leaving room for the complex interactions of higher order thinking that characterize art making is out of place in assessment models for creative disciplines. Therefore, assessment models and methods for arts and design that have been successfully used in the higher education context, including disaggregated approaches that permit more granular, formative feedback, assessment of student works by multiple raters and multiple opportunities that permit such assessment, techniques for engendering evidence-based and meaningful discussion among faculty as to the nature of competencies within a particular creative discipline, and how to arrive at and substantial agreement on what constitutes appropriate student competence at each successive level of faculty expectation are imperative.

**Assessing Creativity:** For the purposes of assessing student learning, systems of assessment need to be sensitive to how different elements of the creative process manifest on the basis of the individual in the teaching and learning relationship. Two examples include the works of Kleiman (2005, 2008) and Sternberg (2006). Kleiman developed five classifications of creativity: constraint-focused, process-focused, product-focused, transformation-focused, and fulfillment-focused. Sternberg developed two theories, The Investment Theory of Creativity (intellectual abilities, knowledge, styles of thinking, personality, motivation, and environment) and The Propulsion Theory of Creative Contributions (Types of Creativity That Accept Current Paradigms and Attempt to Extend Them, Types of Creativity That Reject Current Paradigms and Attempt to Replace Them, A Type of Creativity That Synthesizes Current Paradigms).

The process and product for each student in an artistic domain is likely to have goals unique to the individual, and to proceed according to a plan unique to the student and the instructor. In this regard, the attributes of skill, originality, and invention that are often applied to creativity must be accompanied by an intentional, well-scaffolded program of intensive study, long reflection, persistence, and purposeful practice. Assessment must attend to that which is developed and then demonstrated in expression.

**Models of Assessment:** Creativity assumes myriad modes of expression, and to adequately assess competency of any and all creative forms, numerous models or methods have been constructed based on a breadth on conceptual lenses (normative or peer comparison, internal or external benchmarks, and holistic or economic comparisons, to note a few). These models vary in their consideration of learning theory and learning design, their attention to structure, and their overall specificity.

A meta-level overview of these models can be grouped as such: general education-based assessments, theory-driven assessments, and structural models for assessment design. On a more granular level, these models encompass the work of Alexander Astin (1984/1999) and his Theory of Student Involvement and the I-E-O Model, the Metacognitive Approach of Leslie Cunliffe (2007, 2008a, 2012), Elliott Eisner's Connoisseurship Model (1976, 1985), the work of Williams and Askland (2012) on teaching architecture and design, and the assessment model involving a four-stage taxonomy of creativity, attributed to Paul Kleiman (2005).

**Planning, Assessing, Reflecting and Taking Action:** Regardless of the assessment model chosen, determining what to document and at what level and what depth is essential. In a creative degree program, faculty can start with the student learning outcomes—collective or individual—that are considered most important or essential to the core courses in the curriculum. Then faculty must determine how the outcomes are defined and articulated in practice, how they should be systematically introduced and reiterated in an arts curriculum, how they relate to and reinforce one another, and how they can be assessed. Numerous direct assessment tools are available within arts curricula that can be used on an individual as well as an aggregated basis – such as a rubric-based jury rating of an end-of-term performance. Grading of the performance and individual feedback to the student is vital, but once the results are gathered on a summary level across a group of students and analyzed by faculty for the degree to which the results demonstrate appropriate student achievement of faculty expectations for student learning, they represent a body of collective evidence on which faculty can reflect and utilize as a basis for actions to modify the curriculum or assignment as appropriate.

Once assessment experience is gained, faculty and students can then explore higher order skills and unique outcomes, with the ultimate goal for assessment to be ongoing, systematic, and a periodic review process, with the cycles of review documented, analyzed, reflected upon, and enacted upon, to create and ensure that students are achieving student learning at its highest level.

**Summary:** Assessment in the arts can be challenging because determining the unit of analysis may not be clear cut, because art is both divinely inspired and within a context, and because the traditional model of arts education has been to have a master teacher determine learning—and this is fraught with subjectivity. But ways are being developed within Academe to assess the creative process and learning in quantifiable means without reducing the qualitative values that make fine, visual, and performing arts; design and architecture; and music art.

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## **Engaging Faculty and Staff in Assessment through a Campus-Wide Learning E-Portfolio Initiative**

Danette Ifert Johnson  
Assistant Provost & Director of the Integrative Core Curriculum  
djohnson@ithaca.edu  
Ithaca College

### Abstract

When instituting a new general education curriculum, Ithaca College turned to learning e-portfolios as a central component in assessing student learning. This paper shares strategies for informing and engaging faculty and students in this campus-wide initiative. Included are strategies for introducing students and faculty to e-portfolios, involving different constituents in rubric development, evaluating artifacts, and using assessment evidence to come together as a campus and improve student learning outcomes while meeting institutional planning and accreditation needs.

*Keywords:* e-portfolio, general education assessment, faculty engagement, rubric development

Ithaca College has faced similar challenges as other institutions in assessing student learning in general education, including reliance on course level assessment (McLawhon & Phillips, 2013) and lack of standardized assessment rubrics or criteria. Perhaps the most significant challenge has been absence of specific learning outcomes (Furman, 2013; Wehlberg, 2010).

As part of an institutional strategic planning process, a campus-wide liberal education program, with clearly identified student learning outcomes, was proposed and adopted. In designing the Integrative Core Curriculum (ICC), attention was given to the assessment challenges above. The program has three overarching learning outcomes: integrative thinking, critical and analytical problem-solving, and reflective learning; each ICC requirement also has identifiable student learning outcomes that map onto the overarching ones. Students demonstrate achievement of these outcomes while completing a learning e-portfolio.

This paper describes how a range of campus constituencies have been involved in moving ICC student learning outcomes assessment forward. It focuses on five key needs in implementing the learning e-portfolio: informing and engaging faculty, informing and engaging students, developing assessment rubrics, evaluating e-portfolio artifacts, and using assessment evidence in decision-making. The paper concludes by evaluating the success of activities enacted so far and suggesting additional strategies to continue progress in outcomes assessment.

### Informing and Engaging Faculty

Efforts to engage faculty with the nascent learning e-portfolio endeavor centered on conceptual basics of the e-portfolio platform, TaskStream, and providing pedagogical and

assignment design support that would enable students to represent their learning and achievement of desired student learning outcomes. Partnership with Information Technology Services (ITS) was crucial for e-portfolio implementation and helping faculty understand conceptual basics of TaskStream. Although TaskStream provides extensive technical support, this user population (faculty) desired face-to-face opportunities to understand the portfolio system and needed an overview more than detailed technical assistance. Informational efforts targeted faculty teaching the Ithaca Seminar course required of all first semester students. This group was targeted because it is a first point of contact with incoming students and one of the Ithaca Seminar courses goals is for students to begin building their e-portfolios.

During the retreat for Ithaca Seminar faculty held the spring before implementation, the ITS project lead presented an overview of TaskStream and the specific campus e-portfolio structure developed for the ICC. Additionally, the ITS team developed a series of videos and general information focused on faculty questions and needs. Beyond the ITS videos, a section devoted to faculty questions about the e-portfolio initiative was added to the ICC webpage and an ITS staff member was available for e-portfolio training in individual Ithaca Seminar course sections.

Pedagogy and assignment design information was also integrated into the Ithaca Seminar retreat. For example, a faculty member from the Department of Writing presented strategies for engaging students in reflection on their learning. Assignment design and pedagogy have been topics of ongoing faculty sharing sessions. Faculty teaching courses in specific ICC requirement areas (e.g., diversity, quantitative literacy) have shared assignments and course activities with other interested faculty; the goal of these sessions is to enhance the range of assignment possibilities that faculty members consider when developing courses and provide concrete examples of assignments that link directly to the program's learning outcomes.

These efforts were effective due to strategies of targeted information sharing with specific groups participating in implementation, collaboration between ITS and educational affairs, and the use of multiple information formats and sources.

### Informing and Engaging Students

Students are a second important constituent group for the e-portfolio. Orientation sessions and Ithaca Seminars gave students a general overview of the portfolio initiative. For concrete guidance about creating e-portfolios, partnership with ITS was again crucial. ITS provided a robust website ([www.ithaca.edu/its/traindoc/taskstream/students](http://www.ithaca.edu/its/traindoc/taskstream/students)) that includes videos on getting started with TaskStream and managing tasks commonly requested by students, such as picture resizing. The ITS site provides contact information for programs using the e-portfolio system. Face-to-face training sessions have also been available to students. The ICC webpage has a student-focused section on learning e-portfolios, with frequently asked questions, a mock student e-portfolio, and links to ITS videos. Because transfer student requirements for the e-portfolio differ slightly from first time first year students, the Director of the ICC visited each section of the transfer student Ithaca Seminar to discuss the rationale for completing a learning e-portfolio and specifics about selecting artifacts for inclusion.

As with attempts to inform faculty, information sharing efforts were successful due to targeted information sharing in settings exclusive to incoming students: orientation and Ithaca Seminars, and the availability of information in multiple formats.

#### Developing Assessment Rubrics

Learning e-portfolios are of limited assessment value if there is no means to evaluate how well the work demonstrates student achievement of learning outcomes. Thus, a call for faculty volunteers was made, asking for those interested in developing rubrics to evaluate program components of the ICC and overarching program outcomes. The seven person group divided responsibility for rubric development in the program component areas (Ithaca Seminar, creative arts, humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, first year composition, writing intensive, diversity, quantitative literacy, capstone, and overarching program outcomes) and broke development into two phases, with the first six components comprising the first phase and five the second. The lead person for each rubric searched for existing rubrics from published sources and, where applicable, made use of the AAC&U's VALUE Rubrics ([www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org)). Existing rubrics were adapted or new rubrics were constructed to align with specific ICC student learning outcomes. Each rubric lead shared a draft with colleagues in allied disciplines (e.g., the theatre faculty member leading the creative arts rubric sought feedback from colleagues in art history and music). After additional revisions, rubrics went out to the faculty for feedback. Comments were discussed by the rubric development team and modifications made. Final versions of all eleven rubrics were made available to faculty on the ICC website. Development of these common rubrics addresses a significant general education assessment challenge: lack of standard definitions of achievement and criteria for evaluating student learning outcomes.

#### Evaluating Student Learning E-Portfolio Artifacts

A group of faculty volunteers was likewise sought to recommend processes for evaluating student portfolios. Seven faculty met over one semester and recommended an evaluation system whereby faculty evaluators are paid stipends to participate in portfolio evaluation sessions twice a year. During the first year of implementation, two program components were selected for the first evaluation and three for the second. Each evaluation session begins with a half day discussion of the rubric and norming exercises using sample portfolio submissions. Reviewers then evaluate individually assigned artifacts; some artifacts are evaluated by two reviewers to check reliability of the evaluations. Reviewers continue to evaluate artifacts on day two, with a second norming session possible if dual-scored artifacts from the first day suggest it is necessary.

The first two evaluation sessions have been successful, with 21 and 20 (including 6 returnees) faculty evaluators participating. Faculty have expressed a range of motivations for participating, from curiosity about how students are achieving outcomes to understanding student work in areas they plan to teach in the future or simply better understanding assessment processes. The evaluation sessions also brought together faculty who are teaching in the ICC and those who are not and faculty from various schools across campus. Discussions about both assessment outcomes and the process of assessment were thus enriched by the range of faculty participating.

## Using Assessment Evidence in Decision-Making

Information learned from the process is already being used to guide decision-making. Results of the first evaluations were shared with relevant faculty groups, who discussed conclusions and developed action plans for addressing areas where achievement could be improved. At this point, those plans focus on providing assignments that enable students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. In Academic Writing I, conversations addressed appropriate ways for students to demonstrate the process element of writing and on precisely defining rubric categories (e.g., breaking down “rhetorical knowledge”). These plans are available to faculty and staff via a password protected section of the ICC webpage.

Intact faculty groups do not exist for areas evaluated in the latest session, so another call for faculty volunteers to participate in discussions of results and development of an action plan will go out. To enhance success in garnering volunteers, similar strategies to those that have been effective in the past will be used: a defined task, a defined time frame for the work, and clear expectations of the product to be produced at the end of the group’s work.

Engaging faculty in the actual work of assessment (developing rubrics, evaluating student work, using assessment results) was aided by the explicit strategy of asking faculty to participate in relatively short-term, concrete tasks. Faculty peer engagement during these processes and reaching out to individuals who had prior experience with e-portfolios or who might benefit from participation was also crucial.

## Evaluation of Progress

Evaluating the success of engaging constituencies so far, results are mixed. Fewer students understand the purpose of the e-portfolio than is desired. In a survey of first year students, the average rating for understanding the e-portfolio purpose was 3.49 on a 6 point scale (6 = *strongly agree*). Technical elements, such as navigating the e-portfolio system, did not seem to be an issue, as questions related to those elements averaged 4.2 or higher on the same scale. E-portfolio support resources have not been well-used by all students, as 1/3 to 1/2 of survey respondents indicated that ITS resources or online TaskStream assistance were not applicable. Web information and upcoming summer orientation sessions have been updated to emphasize the rationale for e-portfolios and increase students’ knowledge of information sources. The Ithaca Seminar faculty retreat this spring also discussed ways to assist students in both understanding the portfolio requirement and submitting appropriate artifacts for inclusion in the e-portfolio.

Engaging faculty has been successful in some regards and less so in others. Faculty volunteers in various working groups associated with ICC assessment and e-portfolio evaluations have been highly engaged and have provided insightful feedback about modifying processes, how we talk with students, and outcomes to gain more useful assessment information and enhance students’ ability to demonstrate their learning. Additional work is required to engage other faculty. Discussion of the Ithaca Seminar assessment results with faculty present at this spring’s retreat, including a mock norming session, seems to have resulted in greater awareness of the need for faculty to be explicit in discussing learning outcomes and in thinking about the role reflection can play in developing effective assignments. Whether or not these discussions result in tangible

effects on the nature and quality of e-portfolio submissions won't be evident until the next evaluation cycle, but the involvement of faculty in the conversation is an important first step. Similarly, participants in the evaluation sessions have had an opportunity to see the kinds of assignments that work well in the student e-portfolios and those that aren't as effective in demonstrating student achievement; those participants can now go back to departmental discussions with different insights into how they and their peers can assist students.

Overall, a mix of face-to-face and web-based information sources has been used to inform faculty and students about the e-portfolio initiative. Efforts to engage faculty have focused on soliciting volunteers for specific tasks, with identifiable time frames and concrete products to be produced by the group. Administrative support, in the form of stipends for e-portfolio evaluators and clear institutional commitment to both the ICC and assessment of student learning, has also been key to engaging multiple constituencies.

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## What's Good Enough? Setting Standards

Monica Stitt-Bergh  
bergh@hawaii.edu

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

### Abstract

100 is a good score. Or is it? A score of 100 means little on its own. Standards provide the context or comparison that gives a score meaning. They help us interpret assessment results and figure out how the results can be used to improve teaching and learning. Assessment specialists can use established standard setting processes to increase faculty engagement in assessment and clarify performance expectations on program and institutional learning outcomes. This paper briefly describes a modified Angoff method for setting standards.

*Keywords:* standard setting, assessment in higher education, Angoff method

### What's Good Enough? Setting Standards

As an assessment specialist on my campus, I am asked questions such as this: “Last semester 68% of our students scored ‘3’ and 7% scored ‘4’—is that good enough?” Standard setting provides an answer. Standard setting refers to a process of creating levels of performance so that decisions or classifications of persons can be made (Cizek, 2001). For example, a standard setting process can be used to determine which scores on a rubric or exam correspond to Well Below, Approaches, Meets, and Exceeds Proficiency performance categories. After faculty determine the performance standards or “cutscores,” they will know whether a score of “3” on a rubric or “75” on an exit exam is “good enough.”

My goal in this paper is to describe why standard setting is useful in higher education program-level and institutional-level outcomes assessment, explain the basics, and give an example. I selected this topic because of its usefulness for faculty engagement, its widespread use in other educational contexts, and its noticeable absence in education assessment handbooks (e.g., Allen, 2006; Driscoll & Wood, 2007; Nichols, 1995; Maki, 2004; Walvoord, 2004); Suskie's guide (2009) is the exception. A robust body of literature on standard setting exists and those interested in learning more can start with Hambleton and Pitoniak (2006).

### Standard Setting as Faculty Engagement

One of my primary goals as an assessment specialist on campus is to increase faculty engagement in assessment activities that lead to a tangible product. In standard setting, the primary product is a performance standard or “cutscore.” The process moves faculty from abstract discussions of student work to concrete, product-oriented discussions. Another useful product can be examples of student work at different performance levels. Sharing these examples with students teaches students what is expected and encourages appropriate goal setting.

## Standard Setting Basics

Standard setting requires that informed experts make judgments. It blends artistic, political, and cultural ingredients (Cizek, 2001). Machines cannot determine what performance is “good enough” to be deemed competent. Because peoples’ rationales are made explicit in the process, standard setting can be emotional and reveal deeply rooted beliefs. Careful attention to following agreed-upon steps and methods will not eliminate emotional reactions or political fights, but it can ensure that performance standards are created in a credible, thoughtful, valid manner.

In the next section, I list the nine typical steps (Hambleton & Pitoniak, 2006) and place them in the context of a higher education program- or institutional-level assessment project in which student work is collected and evaluated using a rubric. Of the nine steps, training and feedback (steps 4-6) are most valuable to increase faculty engagement in assessment.

### Example of a Standard Setting Session

Step 1: Select a specific method (over a dozen exist). For faculty involved with program- or institutional-level assessment, I recommend a version of the Angoff method (Hambleton & Pitoniak, 2006, Hambleton & Plake, 1995). The Angoff version that I describe is relatively straightforward and requires only descriptive statistics. The literature explains other methods—for example, the paper selection method (Hambleton & Pitoniak, 2006) may be more appropriate if already-scored student papers are available.

Step 2: Chose participants whose judgments will be used to set the performance standards. When inviting participants, gather 10-15 people (Raymond & Reid, 2001): 70% faculty members and 30% other stakeholders such as employers and faculty from other degree programs. Because standard setting is based on informed expert judgment, the participants need to know the content/skill area, characteristics of the student group, and students’ educational experiences. Participants can learn some of this during session training.

Step 3: Prepare descriptions of performance categories (e.g., meets expectations, does not meet expectations) prior to the session because they can take several hours to develop. A group of faculty can base the descriptions on the exam or assignment template with rubric, student learning outcome(s), and program/institutional learning goals. An external source, such as the Degree Qualifications Profile, may be used too.

Step 4: Orient and train the participants. The facilitator starts the standard setting session by explaining the purpose, consequences of judgments made during the session, and the process. For example, I may make points such as these:

- The purpose of today’s session is to discuss the performance expectations for seniors and recommend cutscores that will be used to classify seniors’ work into three performance categories: exceeds, meets, and below expectations. The program can then calculate the percent of graduating seniors who have met the expectations.
- Setting performance expectations necessarily requires informed, expert judgments. It cannot be done by a machine. Faculty and stakeholders are in the best position to make the important decision of what level of knowledge and skill meets our expectations.

- Because assessment on our campus is for program improvement, the consequences of today’s session will not determine whether an individual student graduates. Instead, the consequences will impact program-level decision making. If we find that the results of graduating seniors fall below the cutscore and into the below expectations category, we need to design and implement a plan aimed at increasing the percent of future students in the meets expectations category.
- Today we will discuss the performance descriptors, assignment template, and rubric and then you will independently score pieces of student work from the senior project course. We’ll discuss everyone’s scores. After you are comfortable with the rubric and scoring, you will estimate the average score that a borderline student will receive on the rubric. We’ll have another group discussion before you’re asked to make your final average score decision. Everyone’s final score will be averaged to set the cutscore. [Note: number the levels of quality on the rubric and remove word descriptors if they exist.]

Helping participants understand and conceptualize the borderline student is an important part of the training session. I explain the borderline student by showing a simple graphic (Figure 1) and saying, “Using your knowledge of the students, the requirements they’ve completed and their educational experiences, as well as what you’ve learned during this session, conceptualize a borderline student who just meets expectations. You will have the borderline student in mind when you write down the average score, which we will do next.”

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Insert Figure 1 about here

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After participants are comfortable with the concept of the borderline student, they are ready to answer the question, “What is the average score on the rubric that a borderline student who meets expectations will receive?” Participants can use a whole number or one decimal place, e.g., 1.8, 2.5, 3.2, and this is their individual cutscore.

Step 5: Collect the participants’ initial cutscores. The facilitator inputs each and calculates the group cutscore (mean or median of participants’ cutscores).

Step 6: Provide the participants with feedback and facilitate discussion. The facilitator displays the group’s cutscore and the individuals’ cutscores (without identifying names). In addition, the facilitator presents normative data if possible: for example, a display of the distribution of actual scores so that participants are aware of the effect of the group’s cutscore. The facilitator leads a discussion in which participants are encouraged to explain their rationale, especially those at the high and low end of the group. The goal is information sharing, not 100% agreement. After listening and taking others’ rationales into consideration, participants have the opportunity to revise their cutscore.

Step 7: Compile participants' (revised) cutscores and determine the final group cutscore (typically the average or median).

Step 8: Participants evaluate the process. Before leaving, the participants complete a survey to evaluate the process. To aid program and institutional assessment, I include questions about the effect the session had on participants' understanding of the subject area (e.g., information literacy), whether they will make changes in how they teach, and whether their expectations for student performance had changed, etc.

Step 9: Prepare documentation of the procedures and a rationale for the performance standard(s). The facilitator uses the session materials, a re-cap of the session process, and any follow-up statistical analyses to provide a justification for the recommended cutscore(s).

## Conclusion

Standard setting can benefit campuses because it offers a set of steps that promote faculty engagement in program- and institutional-level assessment. The process has a specific product—a performance standard/cutscore—that moves assessment forward. The key to its success is found in the discussion. Faculty have reported that such experiences heighten their awareness and lead to pedagogical changes and an appreciation for faculty collaboration. Standard setting also allows employers and others a place at the table. By sharing examples of different levels of performance with students and the expected standard, the program promotes student learning: when students are clear about expectations, they are more likely to meet the expectations and set appropriate goals. Improvement of learning, after all, is the goal of learning outcome assessment and worth the effort of standard setting.

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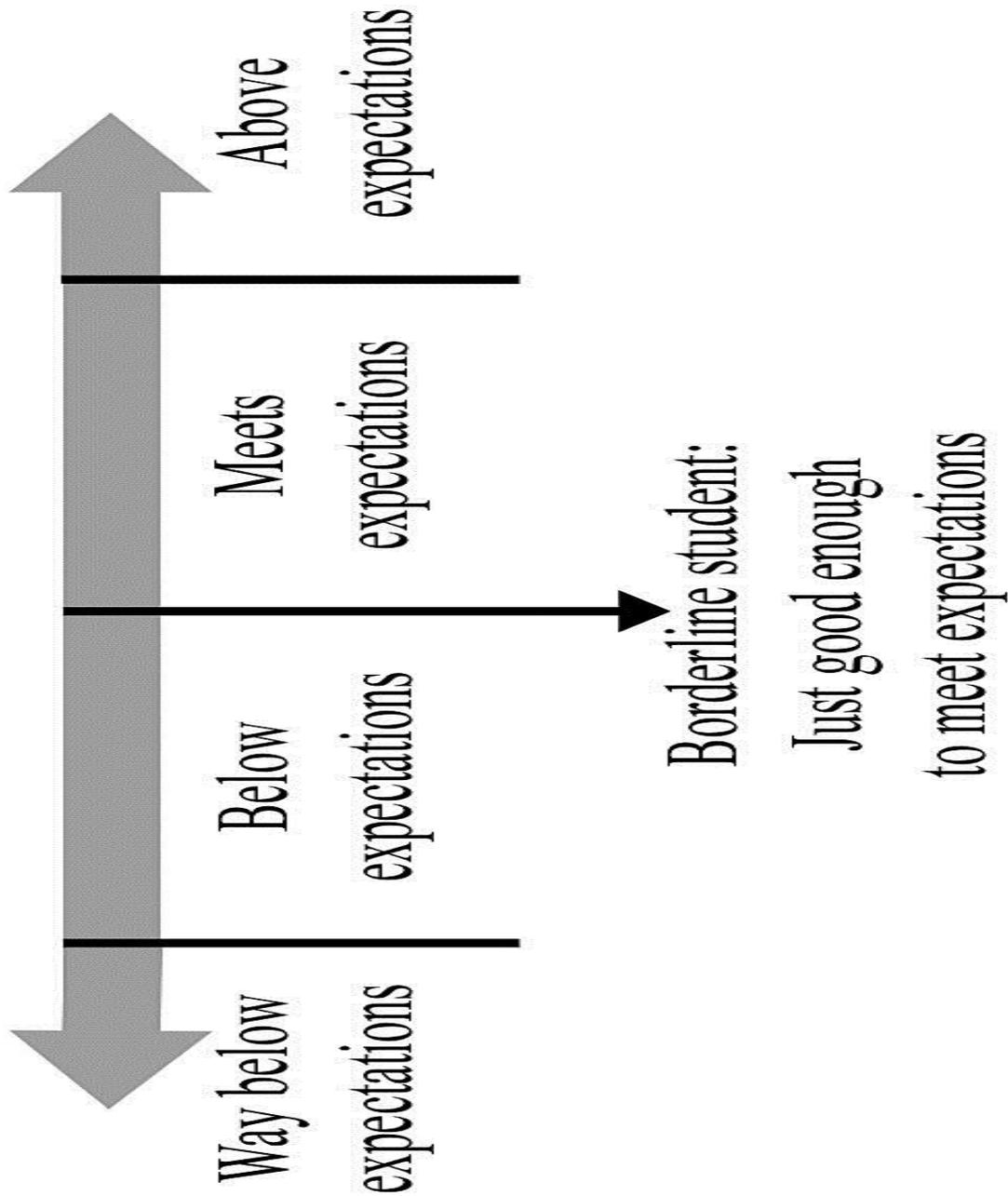
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Figure Caption

Figure 1. An Example of a Borderline Student in the Meets Expectations Performance Category



## **Formulating Appropriate Assessment Policies for your Institution**

Taiwo Ande, PhD.  
Assistant Provost for Institutional Analysis and Effectiveness  
tande@umw.edu

University of Mary Washington

### Abstract

Academic institutions are seeking ways to enhance campus wide participation in assessment activities. While some institutions have been successful, others struggle with sustaining the momentum. In several cases, attempts to introduce assessment and institutional effectiveness to our assessment units have been met with strong pushback. This has led to the creation of assessment policies that should define the guidelines for assessment related activities operations on campuses. Unfortunately, many institutions have created assessment policies that are not implementable and often create bureaucracies that impede on the growth of assessment culture on campuses. This paper discusses the importance of having a university wide accepted assessment policies and how to create good assessment policies that works for your institutions. The paper also share best practices in the implementation of institutional effectiveness policies.

### Introduction

Organizations are continuously looking for ways to strengthen institutional capacity by improving the quality and efficiency of their activities and the experiences of their employees. Many colleges and universities have found the use of policies as an effective tool for guiding the works of their institutions. Several policies focusing on boosting the implementation of strategic plans have been enacted on campuses. However, with increasing call for accountability, colleges now pay close attention to the relevance of existing policies and opportunities for creating new to enhance efficiency within their systems. Campuses now have in place polices that guides their assessment and institutional effectiveness. However, with increased focus on assessment and institutional effectiveness in the past few years, there has been a surge in the number of assessment related policies that are formulated on college campuses.

Assessment polices are expected to set the rules, framework or standards for the operation of assessment related activities. Several advantages can emanate from a good assessment policy. First, with the policy, efficiency in assessment process is enhanced, and faculty and staff have existing framework to rely on for achieving higher academic standards. Secondly, institutions are able to clarify to both internal and external agencies on the structure in place to meet the criteria on assessment and institutional effectiveness. Most academic administrators have also found assessment policies helpful in enhancing the review of several decisions that are taken related to important issues such as resource allocations, graduation rates and quality of learning.

However, in spite of the policies, many still fall short on their institutional effectiveness requirements, and most importantly have not been able to cultivate the culture of assessment and continuous quality improvement. Some institutions have replicated policies of peer institutions without paying close attention to their college mission, type, size, culture, and organizational

structures. Assessment administrators believe that with policies, we show stakeholders how we close the loop on assessment, the entire campus community will be convinced by the results and subsequently engage in institutional effectiveness activities. Unfortunately, there are several assessment policies in our colleges that are not enhancing assessment activities. This has unintended consequences on the ability of these institutions to create a culture of assessment and ultimately enhance institutional effectiveness.

Which Assessment Policy is good for my Institution?

A wide range of assessment policies exist across college campuses. Several institutions have formulated assessment policies that identify specific guidelines to enhance the efficiency and realization of their assessment goals. Examples include assessment policies focused on quality assurance, assessment philosophy and principles, institutional effectiveness cycle, accountability, glossary of assessment terms, and student learning. There is no standard rule on the number of assessment policies an institution must have. Institutions must ensure any policy enacted is applicable to the institution, is monitored and implemented effectively.

In formulating assessment policies, institutions must ensure that any policy enacted is clear, short and simple. Assessment policies are not the same as assessment manuals. A long policy stands the risk of not being helpful to the intended users, so keep it short and precise. The policy should be general enough to cover all assessment areas relevant for passing accreditation or state and federal standards. There is no value to holding on to a policy that is not useful for the intended users. Be willing to reassess and revise existing policies frequently, preferably every two to three years. When possible, adopt your assessment policies on a provisional basis, then evaluate how it works in practice before issuing a final policy.

Formulating your Assessment Policies – Where do I begin?

For institutions to formulate successful assessment policies, lots of factors must be in consideration. First, your policies must be organic to your institution. It is not a bad practice to piggyback on assessment policies from institutions similar to yours. However, you must ensure that those policies are appropriate to your institution. Start with a comprehensive environmental scan of the assessment culture of your institution as you will find this helpful in sorting out important issues you want the policies to address. You must consider institutional characteristics such as type, enrollment, number of academic programs and administrative units, organizational structure, leadership structure and accreditation agencies requirements as you decide on appropriate policies. Having a clear understanding from the beginning; the short term and long term goals of the policies is always helpful. Your policies should not be perceived as additional level of bureaucracy by the stakeholders, therefore you must be articulate on the goals the policies are meant to achieve.

Identifying the relevant stakeholders and getting them involved with the policy formulation process is very vital. Several brainstorming sessions should be encouraged to produce good policy draft. As you put together a framework for developing your policies, the appropriate level at which policies reside within the context of your institution hierarchy needs to be established. An effective policy must be backed up by appropriate level of authority preferably someone within the College President's leadership cabinet. Your assessment policies must be elevated to the same level as other important policies on your campus.

What should be on your Assessment Policies?

Many institutions are finding the use and documentation of assessment policies helpful as they grow a culture of assessment and fulfill accreditation needs on their campus. At the same time, there is no doubt institutions struggle on what a good policy looks like. A good assessment policy has several components that define how helpful the policies can be to the end users. While there are no minimum standards on what should and should not be in a policy, individual institutions have to make decisions on information they consider mandatory and helpful in creating efficient assessment policies. In making the decision, we should not lose focus of keeping the document short and simple. Here are suggestions of basic items your institution should consider including in an assessment policy.

*Identifier:* Your policy must have clear identifiers that make it easy for end users to locate and reference the policy. The identifiers include the policy name, type, number and date of issue. The name of the policy must adequately capture the essence of the policy e.g. institutional effectiveness cycle policy. You should describe the policy type e.g. presidential, academic, or administrative. A number should also be included on the policy to sync with the institutional wide policy numbers.

*Status:* The status of the policy whether active or inactive needs to be included. This is necessary because at some time, some policies are retired for certain period of time to allow for readjustment in the assessment activities. Since it is expected that assessment policies reside with other university wide policies, having an indicator to indicate the status of the policy is very important.

*Contact Office and Oversight Executive:* Identify the office responsible for implementing the policy and also individual(s) with oversight responsibilities.

*Purpose:* Clearly state the purpose for which the policy was drafted. This must be simple and not misinterpreted by end users

*Definitions:* Here, you provide definitions for key words that would need additional interpretation for end users to successfully understand the policy

*Policy Statement:* This is where the institution describes the policy, the purposes, goals and expectations from the end users. The policy statement should be articulated in a way that readers have a clear picture of what is required and how compliance with the policy enhances the overall institutional mission and values.

*Procedures:* This is the most vital piece of the policy. In this section, a description of the general step by step procedures for implementation of the policy is provided. This may include definition timelines, reporting mechanism, individual responsibilities and the chain of approval that may be needed. In this section, you also want to provide a short description of the process for developing, approving and amending the policy. This section should also highlight how the policy will be published and communicated to all end users. It is recommended that assessment policies should reside in the digital repository of University policies and made public. Finally, the office responsible for compliance monitoring and reporting should be identified. Policies can be monitored through self-reporting, direct oversight by the management, or in some cases via external auditing

*Related Information:* In this section, you can provide information such as the background of the policy, the policy category as defined by the institutional wider classification, policy categories crossed referenced, and also related policies

*History:* This section provides a trail of activities that relates to the policy development. Information on the policy should include origination date, approval date, person approving the policy, effective date, review process, next scheduled review, and revision history.

### Summary

As institutions continue to focus on sustaining a culture of assessment on their campuses, several ideas on attaining this goal will always be on the table. Providing the right set of rules and standards for operation of assessment and institutional effectiveness related activities will go a long way in promoting student learning and operational efficiencies. It is worthless to have policies that are not implemented; therefore significant attention must be placed on policy implementation. Getting buy in from faculty and staff and most importantly support from the highest level in the administration is essential. The efficiency of the policies should be monitored regularly and adjustment made where necessary immediately.

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University of Mary Washington (2010). Institutional Effectiveness Cycle Policy. Office of Institutional Analysis and Effectiveness

## **Workplace & Life Competency Badges: Assessing and Documenting Essential Student Learning**

Cia Verschelden  
cverschelden@uco.edu

Sharra Hynes  
shynes1@uco.edu

Amanda Keesee  
akeesee@uco.edu

University of Central Oklahoma

### **Abstract**

At the University of Central Oklahoma, Transformative Learning is expressed in our Central Six tenets: Discipline Knowledge; Leadership; Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities; Global and Cultural Competencies; Service Learning and Civic Engagement; and Health and Wellness. With the Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR, pronounced “stellar”), we will both assess (rubrics) and document (e-portfolios) learning – both in and out of classrooms - for individual students who earn badges at three levels: *exposure*, *integration*, and *transformation*. The STLR process will evolve over time and we will continue to develop new pedagogies and technologies to support student success. The process of the creation of STLR, however, has changed the conversations at UCO in ways that we anticipate will continue and deepen. The lines between in-classroom and out-of-classroom learning have been blurred, we hope permanently. When we talk about student learning and student success, the location of the learning is no longer paramount. This has been one of the most beneficial outcomes of our collective work on STLR.

### **Workplace & Life Competency Badges: Assessing and Documenting Essential Student Learning**

At the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO), we have made a commitment to student learning and student success as the state’s metropolitan university. Key to our work with students and the community are our Central Six Tenets of Transformative Learning. Transformative Learning (TL) at UCO is the learning that results in a fundamental change or expansion in perspective or frame of reference. TL means students conceive of their relationships with self, with others, and with their environments in new ways. TL helps students acquire critical, beyond-discipline skills that prepare them for successful workplace and personal life engagement. It happens in those moments of insight in which students realize they have learned something beyond knowledge or specific skill that will make a meaningful difference in their lives and the lives of those around them.

The Central Six Tenets are Discipline Knowledge; Leadership; Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities; Global and Cultural Competencies; Service Learning and Civic Engagement; and Health and Wellness, and are described briefly below.

## **Discipline Knowledge**

Discipline Knowledge is the category dedicated to the student's chosen field of study. At UCO, students can choose from over 100 majors.

## **Leadership**

Guided by the core values of character, civility, and community, leadership at UCO is a transformational journey centered on learning and focused by integrity, stewardship, and service.

## **Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities**

Research, Creative, and Scholarly Activities are those in which students are mentored by one or more faculty members that lead to "products" (publications, performances, exhibits, etc.) recognized as legitimate creative or scholarly contributions within an academic discipline.

## **Global and Cultural Competencies**

The commitment to Global and Cultural Competencies as part of the transformative learning process at UCO demonstrates the importance of preparing students to communicate effectively in a complex world, to function in multiple and diverse environments, and to adapt to the continuously changing global society. Globally competent students are lifelong learners who are aware of the world around them.

## **Service Learning and Civic Engagement**

Through collaboration and shared resources, Student Affairs and Academic Affairs share the long-term goal of engaging students in curricular and co-curricular activities by teaching and nurturing civic skills, coordinating service learning across the curriculum, and promoting collaborations between students, faculty, staff, and community partners. Experiencing these civic actions as an undergraduate will help promote a commitment to public life, ethical reasoning and deliberation, and lifelong learning.

## **Health and Wellness**

Health and wellness are used interchangeably to mean the ability to live life fully - with vitality and meaning. Wellness is the integration of many different components (physical, spiritual, environmental, emotional, intellectual, and social/interpersonal) that expand one's potential to live, learn, and work effectively and to make a significant contribution to society.

After several years of discussions about how to assess and document student learning related to the Central Six, we have developed the Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR – pronounced “stellar”). (See the attachment for a description and graphic of TL and STLR.) Evolving from the concept of a “co-curricular transcript,” STLR is a system through which students can earn “badges” for achievement in five of the Central Six (the assumption is that Discipline Knowledge is within the responsibility of the academic departments and will be learned by each student through the degree program). There are three badge levels for each tenet: *exposure*, *integration*, and *transformation*. Students will earn credit toward these badges in classes and in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities across campus through programming in student affairs, student life, residence life, and athletics, for instance.

Student achievement at the three levels will be documented through a student's ePortfolio, in which both the student work and the assessment of that work by faculty or professional staff will be stored. This work will include assignments done for classes and the corresponding scoring or grading rubric completed by the instructor. Student performance will be assessed by professional staff for activities like leadership in student government and student organizations, teamwork and leadership in student athletics, service learning and civic engagement, etc. There will be some student activities for which students may get credit toward a badge at the *exposure* level without an assessment of their achievement. With a new card swipe system, we are able to record student attendance at designated STLR activities. In those cases, students will get the most basic STLR credit just for attending.

For our students, their STLR badges and the supporting documentation in their ePortfolios, will position them very well to be able to articulate what they have learned to employers in the areas of the Central Six tenets. In the future, we will ask employers of our graduates for feedback on their employees related to the TL tenets. This kind of direct input will affirm the validity of STLR for assessing and documenting student learning and give us important data about needed improvements in programs and curriculum.

One of the most important outcomes of the STLR-development process at UCO has been the collaborative work among several units, notably Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Information Technology, and Human Resources. Although we have for many years acknowledged that some of the most essential student learning happens in co-curricular, extra-curricular, and other campus environments, the only "official" record of student achievement has been the academic transcript. Through this project, student learning that happens in student life and student affairs activities, through paid student work on campus, on athletic teams, and elsewhere, is assessed and documented at the individual student level. The STLR badges represent the essential workplace competencies and life skills that students gain from participating in the high-impact practices of the Central Six. Student work or performance will be assessed with rubrics; we will use the AAC&U VALUE Rubrics where appropriate and we have created VALUE-like rubrics in areas for which there is not an applicable VALUE rubric. Student work and the assessment of it by faculty or professional staff will be stored in each student's e-portfolio.

Through our collaborative development process, the philosophical notion that there should be no distinction between the learning that students do in the classroom and in "non-academic" areas like student affairs, student life, and athletics, is being actualized through our STLR tool. The cross-sector development team is making real UCO's espoused mission to "...help students learn by providing transformative education experiences to students so that they may become productive, creative, ethical and engaged citizens and leaders serving our global community." STLR is a complex undertaking from an IT perspective and the work of the IT project team has been essential in the development of a usable tool. Representatives from academic and student affairs have collaborated in ways that are precedent-setting for the future of our institution. This collaboration has been *transformative* for those of us who are working to bring it to fruition, giving us good reason to hope that UCO can facilitate the same phenomena with our students. Through STLR assignments, students will reflect on the learning they have experienced, both articulating that learning and incorporating it into their personal and professional selves as they leave UCO for career or further study.

## **Transformative Learning at the University of Central Oklahoma**

College students are expected to learn the content in their disciplines, but they must also learn other things that are just as important. They must learn how to work well in teams with people whose opinions differ from their own. They must learn leadership skills. They must develop the ability to interact positively and appropriately with co-workers, customers, and others from different countries and cultures. They must know how to contribute as productive citizens to their local communities, the nation, and the world. They must learn how to tackle unscripted problems and devise creative solutions.

Important skills and knowledge such as these are not documented on the academic transcript, but a university graduate should be able to demonstrate them.

The University of Central Oklahoma's (UCO's) Transformative Learning approach utilizes a unique tool and process to ensure that our graduates possess these important employability, communication, and citizenship skills. The tool is the Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR). Faculty and professional staff intentionally create learning activities and environments designed to expand students' perspectives about themselves and others so that they understand the benefit of developing important life skills while they are in college and afterwards as life-long learners.

To help our students realize the value of learning these important skills, we must provide many opportunities for them to practice and then reflect upon the importance of these skills to their success in life and work. We do this via a structure we call the Central Six Tenets of Transformative Learning and a process in which students progress through successive levels of engagement and performance as documented in their achievement of TL badges:



STLR works like this:

- An instructor selects one or more of the Central Six Tenets he realizes connects to the content in his class. He then creates an assignment or activity that will help students reach one or more of the outcomes in the class *and* will provide an opportunity for students to expand their perspectives related to the Central Six Tenet(s) selected.
- Using a rubric that describes performance criteria for the Central Six Tenet selected, the instructor rates the degree to which students have demonstrated in the assignment, in a self-reflective narrative, or in observed behavior that they have connected the relevance of the Tenet to their personal lives. The assignment, the rubric, and the rating are all automatically imported into the e-portfolio associated with STLR, and the point(s) earned are added to the student's badge total for that Tenet.
- Professional staff in Student Affairs do the same as instructors, except they manage their assessments through events or student groups or other student activities. For events, students present their student identification cards for entry; simple attendance at an event connected to a Tenet is automatically rated at the lowest level on the Tenet rubric. It is only for those students who demonstrate a higher level of achievement on the Tenet during the event or the work associated with the event who are rated by professional staff.

These ratings can be done at the event using a tablet, smart phone, or similar device. Students can later upload into STLR documents or media to support the higher ratings (for example, a video of the student’s activity at the event or acknowledgment letters from event sponsors). Points from the ratings are added to the student’s badge total for that Tenet. For ongoing work with student groups or activities, for instance, student government, rubrics for leadership and civic engagement will be used to score student performance within STLR.

- The interactive STLR student app allows students to choose upcoming classes and/or Student Affairs activities connected to the Central Six. For example, a student may want to work toward a top-level status in a particular Tenet so when she graduates she can prove to potential employers that she is proficient in non-academic skills important in that field of work. If she is majoring in kinesiology, for instance, she may want to choose classes and activities that focus on Leadership and Health and Wellness. When she interviews with potential employers, she can provide samples from STLR as evidence supporting her competence in the non-academic skills related to that job along with her transcript and résumé.

Please visit UCO’s [Transformative Learning Guide](#) for more information about what Transformative Learning (TL) is and how we do it. Visit our [TL Conference](#) web page for information about our annual TL Conference, a gathering where higher education faculty, administrators, and Student Affairs professionals share best practices about TL.



**Leading Local Change:  
Assessment as a Dialogue towards Transformation in Higher Education**

Catherine M. Wehlburg, Ph.D.  
Associate Provost  
c.wehlburg@tcu.edu

Texas Christian University

**Abstract**

Higher education is in a time of transitions. We are hit by many sides – economic forces, legislative mandates, accreditation requirements, under-prepared students, uninformed boards, and faculty frustrations. What can we do as assessment professionals? We can stick our heads in the sand or we can use our roles as change agents to make a real difference. This session will identify methods and theories of change and how we can use these to make meaningful transformations on our campuses.

Higher education is in a challenging time. There is an almost constant barrage of articles and statements about problems and a need for change in higher education that range from whether or not students are really learning to how many students are not graduating. These calls for change are certainly not new; even in 1983 (and before) Richard Cyert, president of Carnegie-Mellon University, stated that “it has become commonplace to warn that the next decades will be a time of great change for America’s colleges and universities” (p. vi).

However, the calls for change and the heightening levels of discontent with American higher education seem to be very real and growing. Popular press articles and books (for example, Arum and Roksa’s *Academically Adrift*) seem to be hitting higher education from all sides. Calls for accountability grow and the general public seems to be becoming more hostile toward higher education. The belief that a college education should prepare each student for a “job” is becoming more and more strongly held by many. A “liberal arts” education and the idea of “learning to learn” is becoming lost amid the cries for lower tuition, faster graduation, and more employment.

This session at the 2014 AALHE conference focused on how assessment professionals can become a part of this public dialogue. It outlines ways that assessment data can be better gathered and shared to bring facts and information into the discussion. Those in the area of higher education assessment are actually very well suited to become agents of change inside their institutions and this can have wide-spread impact on higher education, in general.

**Current Situation**

It probably comes as no surprise to anyone in higher education that the assessment process is not usually seen as a welcome practice. Many faculty and staff avoid the program-level assessment of learning until they are forced into doing it. Then, it becomes a completion

task rather than part of the overall cycle to make better decisions. Because of this, a great deal of assessment data are never actually used – they are reported and then filed away. The box is “checked off” when the assessment report is turned in.

And, if assessment data are somehow used to try to inform changes, there is often push back from faculty, staff, and others within the institution. According to Randy Swing (2008), what happens now when assessment data show a need for change is that faculty will:

1. Attack the instrument/measurement - (bad survey, doesn't measure the brilliance of my program)
2. Attack the methodology(response rate, timing, sample, “not a perfect experimental design”)
3. Attack the analysis
4. Cry, Whine, Pound Fist on Table
5. Attack the Assessment Officer - he/she/it isn't qualified to evaluate me!

This, of course, doesn't actually help higher education move forward. And, if assessment data are accurate, they should either inform the institution that it should continue what is working or it should help identify needed areas of meaningful improvement.

### Role of Assessment Officer

Since assessment data are usually collected by an institutional contact, there is the potential to have data collected into a single office or space. And, if that data is about meaningful issues or learning areas, others should be interested in that data. Therefore, assessment professionals have the duty to share these data with those who need to know. That may not make a person popular, but it is an essential part of transformation.

### Who Needs Data? And Why?

Several populations on institutional campuses need to have access to good quality assessment data in order to make effective decisions. These groups include faculty, upper level administrators, staff, and students.

#### Faculty

Why would faculty want to know about assessment data?

- They care about student learning
- They have institutional knowledge and know what can work and what needs to change
- They have direct access to the students
- They can push for change in the administration

Clearly, faculty are a key population. However, getting faculty to assess learning and then to work with the analyzed data can be difficult. Why? Because faculty are busy. They teach several courses a semester, they advise and mentor students, they work on committees, they do research, they write for publication, they plan for future semesters, and many are involved with their disciplinary communities. In addition, many have family commitments and a life outside of the

institution. They may not see “assessment” as part of their job – and they almost certainly do not see institutional change as their responsibility. In addition, faculty are usually rewarded for research and teaching. Assessment is often not highly valued because it will not help get tenure or promotions.

But, faculty are essential to institutional and program-level change. Working with faculty is a crucial and integral part to any assessment plan. Assessment professionals can develop faculty learning communities and can help to keep the focus on issues of student learning. Faculty Senates or the institutional faculty committee structure can be a way to share assessment results with faculty in ways that will make sense and will be focused on what students learn. Assessment professional should make a point of attending faculty meetings (even if they must ask for an invitation!). Faculty are the heart of an institution and if assessment is going to be a part of change, faculty must be part of this dialogue.

### Administrators

Provosts, Presidents, and Deans are often the ones that spearhead institutional-level changes. When they have good data about important goals and outcomes, these changes can move an institution forward and help to prepare for future strategic planning. Administration often has power and influence on the budget, faculty and staff hires, and they really do want what is best for the institution. So, they need good quality assessment data in a timely and understandable way.

Administrators often do not have time to do the analysis of data – they need it to be done for them and brought to them in ways that they can use. They need solutions to existing problems and they need to be informed about what is going on around campus. Assessment professionals need to touch base with these key administrators on a regular basis and bring them the data that they need to use and use well.

### Staff

Staff members are often the ones who will implement some of the changes that occur across campus. Consider the role of the registrar as a new general education curriculum goes forward, or the learning management system staff who are working to implement a new on-line program – these individuals need to be a part of the data collection process so that they better understand the analysis and can implement necessary change. These individuals are often not part of the assessment and improvement process – but they should be. They are usually not rewarded for change and they may not have accurate data. Providing them with meaningful data and getting feedback from them about issues will help this process work more effectively.

## Transformative Change Through Assessment

Knowing what to change and how to change often depends on what data are available. Assessment professionals need to understand higher education policies, assessment best practices, accreditation requirements, and federal mandates – just to name a few. This is a difficult job and it takes someone who is able to see the large picture and work with others across campus to assess appropriately and then share results with those who need it.

But how? This is a very difficult job description for an assessment professional. The following questions can help to begin the process:

- Are our students meeting our mission statements? Is our Mission Statement any good?
- Do faculty teach with the mission statement in mind? How do we know? What does this do for student learning?
- Are our students becoming more global? More able to solve problems? Better able to think critically?
- What do our constituents want to know? Why?
- How do we know? What do we know?

Asking the right questions at the right time is an essential role of an assessment professional. Because, when it comes down to it, it's not about assessment – it's about learning.

Good assessment practices and information sharing can provide support to higher education and institutional level practices. Good assessment can provide a map into the future. And, with this, higher education can change because the focus will be on what is really important, not just on what is easily measured.

Change is hard and it takes time. And, few people actually enjoy change. And, assessment professionals probably won't be celebrated a lot on campus. It's a hard job and a sense of humor is absolutely necessary. But – assessment professionals are change agents and can make difference. They can help to measure learning in ways that can be shared with others to make a meaningful difference. Given all of the issues facing higher education (access questions, student engagement, state board of education, accreditation mandates, increases in class size, decreases in budgets, to name a few), it is essential that assessment professional help to lead the way. It is time for assessment professional to actively take on the unofficial title of “change agent.” Of course, wearing tights and a red cape is up to each individual's discretion, but higher education needs change that is based on good, solid, meaningful data. Transformation will happen – and assessment professionals need to be a major player in gathering and providing this data.

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## Establishing Interrater Agreement in the “Writing Across the Institutions” Project

Jion Liou Yen, Ph.D.  
yenji@lewisu.edu

Genevieve Boesen  
gboesen@govst.edu

### **Abstract**

How a common rubric (AAC&U VALUE Rubric: Written Communication) was operationalized in a consortium-sponsored 'Writing Across the Institutions' assessment project. This study examined various measures in estimating interrater reliability and discussed how data was used to help English faculty from 12 institutions engage in an open, collegial discussion to enhance their understanding of the rubric and scoring process as well as reach consistency in their expectations of 1<sup>st</sup> year college writing.

*Keywords:* Writing Assessment, College Writing, Authentic Assessment, Common Rubric, Interrater Reliability, AAC&U Written Communication VALUE Rubric

### **Introduction**

Amid increased calls for greater accountability in outcomes assessment, the South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium (SMHEC), a collaboration of 12 two- and four-year institutions in the southern suburbs of Chicago, launched a two year writing assessment pilot project. The purpose of the ‘Writing Across the Institutions’ (WAI) project was to provide a single forum to discuss first-year college writing assessment through the adoption of the AAC&U VALUE rubric for written communication. Utilizing their collaborative resources, a multi-institutional team comprised of 18 writing faculty, a SMHEC administrator, and an institutional research/assessment practitioner worked hand-in-hand to shape the assessment process while developing a common language about college writing.

One of lessons learned from this study was that writing assessment is sensitive to local contexts. Focusing on rater consistency with a common rubric was a key success factor in inter-institutional assessment of student work, as faculty raters initially did not score student assignments in the same manner. Instead, their scores reflected their teaching philosophies and their campuses’ educational practices. To achieve equitable outcomes, a total of eight norming sessions were conducted to facilitate the WAI participants’ understanding of the VALUE writing rubric. In addition, interrater reliability estimates were collected on three waves of the WAI data to assess interrater agreement among faculty raters. Various statistical methods in estimating interrater reliability were established to create an educator-friendly validation environment for open, collegial discussions on improving scoring consistency between raters with a common rubric. The use of reliability estimates also helped the group refine the data collection process and led them to closer agreement on what freshman writing should look like. The project concluded in the summer of 2013 with a plan to expand the sharing of the WAI model among SMHEC member institutions. The intent was to help strengthen individual institutional

approaches to outcomes assessment and to continue to support a culture of shared purpose in quality improvement.

### **WAI Pilot Project**

Over 20 years, SMHEC's work has always focused on promoting student success through resource optimization and professional development. Responding to internal and external demands for improvement, the Chief Academic Officers of SHMEC perceived a need for an inter-institutional forum for writing faculty to address several assessment related objectives:

- 1) Articulate indicators for student preparation to meet minimum college writing expectations,
- 2) Identify particular areas for improvement in student writing skills,
- 3) Provide assessment data to inform curricular improvement,
- 4) Align writing expectations and outcomes across institutions, and
- 5) Communicate what good writing looks like.

The ultimate goal of this collaborative effort was to achieve cross-sector (two-year and four-year institutions) horizontal alignment of performance expectations in first-year writing and to ensure comparability of content and expectations among writing courses with the same title. To accomplish this, SMHEC teamed up with the Southland Writing Consortium to initiate the pilot project, "Writing Across the Institutions." This collaborative group decided to use the AAC&U Value Rubric for Written Communication as the common rubric to assess student writing and to articulate appropriate entrance and exit performance expectations for college-level writing at all participating colleges/universities.

### **Common Rubric: AAC&U Written Communication VALUE Rubric**

Using the VALUE rubric as a standardized measure to assess student writing proved to be most challenging for the faculty participants in this two-year project. Writing assessments at the postsecondary level have always been locally based, with locally controlled processes that respond to local goals (O'Neil and Murphy, 2012, NCTE-WPA, 2014). Because of the potential use of WAI results as a basis for policy initiatives, the participating faculties needed to consider the broader implications of writing assessments both within and beyond the local contexts. The framework and shared language provided by the VALUE rubric helped these faculties from diverse institutions to calibrate themselves and reach similar expectations on levels of college writing. Through the eight norming sessions, four utilized audience response technology (clickers), they achieved a shared understanding of how to use the VALUE writing rubric as a development rubric, rather than a grading rubric, to track students' progress as writers over time. In addition, the backward design concept embedded in the VALUE rubric was helpful for WAI faculties in arriving at a big picture understanding, starting with the end goal for meaningful assessment in mind, and for clearly communicating with their students about what qualities characterized proficiency at different levels of writing. To ensure comparability of scoring, WAI faculties engaged in highly charged conversation to defend their own views of performance expectations and provided arguments in support of their evaluative choices. Additionally, they wrestled with many questions about what constituted as evidence of good writing, improving

their ability to interpret the dimensions/criteria and level of performance (as specified by rating scales and descriptors) used in the writing rubric. Henceforth, they developed a “cheat sheet” that employed additional key words and phrases in certain descriptors to enable more accurate scoring and to increase interrater reliability (see Appendix).

### **Authentic Assessment Rubric Validation: Interrater Reliability**

Authentic assessment entails judging student learning by measuring performance according to life skills criteria. When applied to authentic assessment, rubrics provide scoring standards to focus and guide authentic assessment activities and thus enhance the quality of assessments. Although rubrics are described as objective and consistent scoring guides, they are also criticized for lacking sufficient evidence of reliability and validity (Suskie, 2006; Jonsson and Svingby, 2007). One way to rectify this situation is to conceptualize gathering rubric reliability and validity evidence as part of an assessment process (Yen and Hynes, 2012). The increased movement toward adopting authentic forms of assessment (e.g., e-portfolios) as alternatives to traditional standardized assessments has pushed for large-scale, empirically based validation studies of VALUE rubrics (Finley, 2012; Rhodes and Finley, 2013). As the WAI project aimed to inform best practices in writing assessments, it was critical to assemble evidentiary arguments to support decision-making when scoring with the VALUE rubric. Thus, this cross-institutional study focused on examining rater agreement in employing the VALUE rubric, gathering information on student performance, and using the findings to answer three proposed questions: (1) Does a student receive the same grade on the same assignment at each participating institution? (2) Are some instructors more demanding and some more lenient in grading practices? (3) Is an A at one institution equivalent to an A at another?

### **Methodology and Data Collection**

Research indicates that different approaches to calculate rater agreement can lead to different estimates of interrater reliability, and no one standardized method of estimating interrater agreement exists (Graham et al., 2012; O’Neill and Murphy, 2012). To facilitate a better understanding of the implications of different estimates, the WAI adopted different estimations of interrater reliability, ranging from simple percentage of agreement calculations to more robust measures, such as intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), on the three sets of data collected. To promote dialogue among participants in an educator-friendly assessment environment, Pearson  $r$  and Spearman  $\rho$  correlation coefficients were also calculated and presented to the group.

In year one, there were two waves of data collection with 16 faculty raters, assigned to 19 rater groups, to independently evaluate student work collected at 12 institutions. A total of 76 written assignments were collected, assignments which differed from institution to institution. In year two, common assignments were used, and a total of 57 assignments were collected. Fourteen participating faculty were assigned to 10 rater groups in assessing student work, using a modified VALUE writing rubric with a supplemental cheat sheet. An additional interrater reliability analysis was conducted at the eighth norming session, with 11 faculty raters assessing two students’ writing assignments.

## **Findings**

The findings showed that the overall level of agreement of 16 raters was low during the first two rounds of data collection in 2011. Compared to Round 1, a higher level of agreement was achieved in Round 2, based on average ICCs (.19 vs. -.29). Interrater agreement in the year 2 Round 3 data collection was improved when incorporating a common assignment and a rubric cheat sheet in the process. The average ICCs (.36) indicated a fair level of agreement between multiple raters in their ratings and moderate agreement in the domains of context (.52) and source (.54). Finally, high interrater reliability (ICC=.82) was achieved by 11 WAI faculty at the last (eighth) norming session in 2013.

## **Conclusions and Implications**

The findings showed that a desired level of interrater reliability was achievable when using a common rubric to assess student writing samples across multiple institutions. Core expectations identified by the Writing Communication VALUE Rubric had provided the 18 participating English faculty members with a common vocabulary when discussing first year college writing. Furthermore, the establishment of interrater reliability at various points throughout the project was instrumental in helping the WAI team continuously modify data collection and scoring processes. The shared goal of increasing interrater agreement allowed WAI researchers to make a breakthrough move in the second study year by adopting a common assignment across institutions (Rhodes & Finley, 2013). Focusing on rater consistency also helped them refine the assessment model and led to reformulation of the three proposed questions into the following:

1. Is a student assessed similarly by instructors from different institutions?
2. Are some instructors more demanding and some more lenient in their summative assessment practices?
3. Is there more disparity between some categories than others?
4. Do instructors across institutions seek the same learning outcomes?

In conclusion, the 2-year WAI project confirmed the utility of the VALUE rubric in postsecondary writing assessments across two- and four-year institutions. The project established a best practice approach to utilize and validate the VALUE rubric, which can be adopted by individual campuses to advance assessment efforts.

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# Appendix: AAC&U Written Communication VALUE Rubric Cheat Sheet

## WRITTEN COMMUNICATION VALUE RUBRIC

*for more information, please contact [valuel@aacu.org](mailto:valuel@aacu.org)*



### Definition

Written communication is the development and expression of ideas in writing. Written communication involves learning to work in many genres and styles. It can involve working with many different writing technologies, and mixing texts, data, and images. Written communication abilities develop through iterative experiences across the curriculum.

*Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (all one) level performance.*

	Capstone 4	Milestones		Benchmark 1
		3	2	
<b>Context of and Purpose for Writing</b> <i>Includes considerations of audience, purpose, and the circumstances surrounding the writing task(s).</i>	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of context, audience, and purpose that is responsive to the assigned task(s) and focuses all elements of the work.	Demonstrates adequate consideration of context, audience, and purpose and a clear focus on the assigned task(s) (e.g., the task aligns with audience, purpose, and context).	Demonstrates awareness of context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., begins to show awareness of audience's perceptions and assumptions).	Demonstrates minimal attention to context, audience, purpose, and to the assigned tasks(s) (e.g., expectation of instructor or self as audience).
<b>Content Development</b>	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to illustrate mastery of the subject, conveying the writer's understanding, and shaping the whole work.	Uses appropriate, relevant, and compelling content to explore ideas within the context of the discipline and shape the whole work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop and explore ideas through most of the work.	Uses appropriate and relevant content to develop simple ideas in some parts of the work.
<b>Genre and Disciplinary Conventions</b> <i>Formal and informal rules inherent in the expectations for writing in particular forms and/or academic fields (please see glossary).</i>	Demonstrates detailed attention to and successful execution of a wide range of conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) including organization, content, presentation, formatting, and stylistic choices	Demonstrates consistent use of important conventions particular to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s), including organization, content, presentation, and stylistic choices	Follows expectations appropriate to a specific discipline and/or writing task(s) for basic organization, content, and presentation	Attempts to use a consistent system for basic organization and presentation.
<b>Sources and Evidence</b>	Demonstrates skillful use of high-quality, credible, relevant sources to develop ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing	Demonstrates consistent use of credible, relevant sources to support ideas that are situated within the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates an attempt to use credible and/or relevant sources to support ideas that are appropriate for the discipline and genre of the writing.	Demonstrates an attempt to use sources to support ideas in the writing.
<b>Control of Syntax and Mechanics</b>	Uses graceful language that skillfully communicates meaning to readers with clarity and fluency, and is virtually error-free.	Uses straightforward language that generally conveys meaning to readers. The language in the portfolio has few errors.	Uses language that generally conveys meaning to readers with clarity, although writing may include some errors.	Uses language that sometimes impedes meaning because of errors in usage.

### Principal Author

Name: Jion Liou Yen, Ph.D.  
 Title: Associate Vice President  
 Institution: Lewis University  
 Email: [yenji@lewisu.edu](mailto:yenji@lewisu.edu)  
 Telephone: 815-836-5640

### Co-Presenter

Name: Genevieve Boesen  
 Title: Executive Director  
 Institution: South Metropolitan Higher Education Consortium  
 Email: [gboesen@govst.edu](mailto:gboesen@govst.edu)  
 Telephone: 708-534-4984

## About AALHE

The **Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE)** is an organization of practitioners interested in using effective assessment practice to document and improve student learning. As such, it aims to serve the needs of those in higher education for whom assessment is a tool to help them understand learning and develop processes for improving it.

AALHE began to take shape in late 2009. Formed in part because no other organization had emerged to replace the range of resources and opportunities for interaction that the Assessment Forum of the American Association for Higher Education had offered until it closed in 2005, AALHE's Founding Board of Directors launched this organization with the intention of providing much richer resources and a wider range of interactive opportunities than the Assessment Forum did, largely because much of its content and conversations will be online.

The organization has been designed to constitute a wide range of resources for all who are interested in the improvement of learning, from assessment directors who organize and manage programs, to faculty and Student Affairs professionals who use assessment strategies to understand their students' learning, to graduate students and others who are conducting research on the effectiveness of assessment processes and instruments, to institutional researchers who want to develop effective learning data systems. Through its largely virtual design, AALHE proposes to stimulate discussions both within the groups described above and within the larger community of assessment practitioners. AALHE intends to offer assessment practitioners a variety of ways to learn and share their thoughts about assessing and improving learning.

The annual AALHE Conference Proceedings will be published each year following the annual conference. Members whose proposals for a conference session have been accepted will be invited to submit a manuscript for the Conference Proceedings.

AALHE is housed at the University of Kentucky, which provides generous technical and staff support, but the organization remains an independently incorporated, member-funded, non-profit entity recognized by the State of Kentucky.