Harold Washington College
Assessment Committee Annual Report
Fall 2008 – Summer 2009

"Harold Washington College deserves much praise for its progress in articulating and assessing Student Learning Outcomes for its seven general education outcomes. The Assessment Committee is a very effective group; the members are committed to their purpose, and have worked to change the assessment culture at HWC."

HLC Report Comprehensive Evaluation Visit:
Advancement Section May 4, 2009 Page 7

Introduction

This has been a busy year for the Assessment Committee in which much has been achieved. This report summarizes and comments on the major activities and achievements of the committee. Particular attention is paid to the breadth and depth of faculty involvement in this voluntary contribution to the quality of collegiate life and the centrality of focusing on student learning outcomes as both the primary charge of the committee and the vision of the college. Specific tasks, results, and challenges are presented, discussed, and indicators for the future work of the committee are itemized.

Participation Data

These data are presented to give some sense of the scale and scope of faculty involvement in Assessment Committee activities.

Fall Semester	
Assessment Committee Standard Meetings	12
End of Semester Celebration with Guests & Administration	1
Lowest weekly meeting attendance	12
Highest weekly meeting attendance	18
Average weekly meeting attendance	15
Number of Departments represented	9 out of 10
Number of meetings Administration Representatives present	9 out of 12
This semester there were five new faculty members who joined the committee: John Kieraldo (Library), Fara Movahedzadehi (Biology), Margarita Chavez (Foreign Languages/ESL), Jamie Millan (Physical Science), and Irene Yashina (Biology).	
Spring Semester	
Assessment Committee Standard Meetings	12
Mock NCA Visit	1
NCA Panel Accreditation Meeting	1
Lowest weekly meeting attendance	13
Highest weekly meeting attendance	18
Average weekly meeting attendance	16
Number of Departments represented	9 out of 10
Number of meetings Administration Representatives present	7 out of 12
This semester there were three new faculty members who joined the committee: Kurt Sheu and Jeffrey Swiggart (Mathematics) and La Rhue Finney (English).	

The above table shows the Committee continued to attract new members who contributed valuably to our work. There is, however, an over representation of untenured and recently tenured faculty, which may restrict the specific cultural and institutional knowledge the committee has at its disposal. This is an issue that will be returned to in the report conclusion.

Fall Semester 2008 Committee Activity
The committee began this semester by utilizing five subcommittees to manage the planned work. The flexible subcommittee structure allowed committee members to work simultaneously on the following: the upcoming physical science assessment, the preparatory work for the math assessment scheduled for fall 2009, continuing work on finalizing the Humanities Assessment Report, initial work on how to assess Writing Across the Curriculum, and a communications group responsible for updating the assessment website and newsletter production.

The largest investment of time this semester was allocated to the preparation and implementation of the natural science assessment. The data collection occurred during Assessment Week beginning October 15th and ran over a two-week period to ensure enough completed surveys were returned from volunteered and selected sections.

Successful Fall Assessment Week
The chosen and adapted tool for the physical science assessment was the 'Epistemological Beliefs Assessment for the Physical Sciences (EBAPS)'. The completion data for the assessment of the physical science general education outcomes were:

- 36 faculty were involved from 8 academic departments;
- The committee used 46 faculty volunteered class sections;
- Most faculty were used for just one section but a few faculty were used for up to three of their sections to ensure we covered most of the timetable; and,
- This voluntary activity resulted in 881 completed surveys.

Using a credit student enrollment figure for the fall 2008 semester of 7,000, this represented a sample size of 12.58% of our students. This was easily above the required 10% for the accuracy of the sample and gave the committee a little breathing space to account for unreadable surveys.

Sections were used from across the timetable. There was some imbalance between level 100 and level 200 volunteered sections that we were not able to even out. Completed surveys came from 512 students in 27 level 100 classes and 369 students in 19 level 200 classes. The average response rate from utilized sections was 19 surveys, across both level 100 and 200 courses.

Processing of these paper survey responses was conducted by two committee members using a special assignment at the end of the spring 2009 semester. The subsequent data analysis and initial report writing were scheduled as a special assignment during the summer of 2009.

Initial Work for Math Assessment
Faculty continued throughout the semester with establishing the student learning outcomes for general education mathematics. These outcomes were written,

edited and committee-approved during the semester. They were also used in discussion with the Mathematics Department faculty to ensure broader faculty engagement was obtained before progressing further with the assessment cycle. This process of discussion, development and approval was fully faculty driven and took considerable time to work through the college faculty community. By the time the student learning outcomes are finalized they have been thoroughly discussed by the committee and have gone through a considerable number of revisions.

This element of the assessment cycle was then followed by tool selection, creation or adaptation. As is the standard practice, the selected tool was then piloted amongst committee members first before embarking on a small student pilot. Committee members piloted the hybrid tool during a standard Assessment Committee meeting with evident humor and trepidation.

Dialogue, Reiteration and Membership

During the course of this semester there were four meetings where considerable discussion took place about the purpose, practice and implications of assessment at Harold Washington College. This continued dialogue about the nature of assessment highlights a number of things about the functioning of the committee. Firstly, that this is a dynamic and vibrant committee where academic and practical discussions are commonplace. Secondly, that expertise is continually shared and built as members sustain their involvement, especially as they experience a full assessment cycle. Thirdly, it indicates the necessity to reiterate our purposes and practices fairly consistently as there are always new committee members unfamiliar with both our charge and practical operations. While this may seem somewhat repetitive to long-standing committee members, it remains a necessary function with an ever-evolving membership.

Widening Reputation

This semester the committee also received two requests from other institutions of higher education to use our home-created assessment tools. Both Southeastern University and Triton College asked use our Diversity Assessment tool. This is a very positive response to our work, showing its wider value beyond the college. Approvals for this tool use were granted on the basis that these institutions would also share with us their methodology and results.

Communication and Technology

This semester also saw considerable work on the Assessment Committee website which had not been updated for a number of years. This work highlighted the need for skilled technology assistance if the committee is to maintain the website and expand its use to include a more significant archival role. The committee also recognized that our website could play a more significant role in how other institutions first encounter our assessment work. We have not, as yet, fully explored the use of technology as an integral part of our assessment cycle. This point will be further addressed in the conclusions to this report. The communications sub-committee also produced another edition of the ‘Assessment Times’ that was widely circulated and well received.

Additional Research Resources
A significant development this semester was the addition of a research assistant as a permanent attachment to the committee. This was a clear indicator of administration responsiveness to committee needs. It had been noted by the committee for some time that our statistical and research capabilities would require increasing resources for our work to continue at the pace and standard already set by the committee. This also provided a strong link with the Office of Research and Planning, giving the committee dedicated resources to support our charge. Unfortunately, the research assistant moved to a new position outside of the college before we could really begin to utilize this new and important resource.

Internal Recognition of Assessment Work
Fall semester culminated in a special meeting for which the college administration provided food to celebrate the hard and successful work of the Assessment Committee. This was a chance for committee members and guests to contemplate the importance of our work with regard to the upcoming reaccreditation visit in the spring.

Spring Semester 2009 Committee Activity
Four key sub-committees were established for this semester's work: Math, Science, Social Science and Writing Across the Curriculum. Committee Chair and Vice Chair circulated amongst all of these sub-committees throughout the semester. The committee Chair also took key responsibility for the administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) which was scheduled for March and would be our second use of the University of Texas tool. The Assessment Website was updated prior to the NCA accreditation visit, but this effort was challenged by both the time available for the task and the technological expertise available to the committee.

NCA Accreditation Visit
Early in January the committee took part in a mock NCA visit with President Guengerich from Wright College. This experience, and the feedback we received, proved to be very helpful in preparing committee members for the actual accreditation meeting. A second meeting was also held with the two previous chairs of the committee and the Vice President provided a useful PowerPoint with key issues and questions for consideration for committee members in advance of our meeting with the accreditation panel members. The accreditation meeting with the Assessment Committee took place March 2nd at 3 p.m. Current and previous committee members were in attendance. The selected quote below from the Accreditation Report attests to the meeting outcome.

"The Assessment Committee has created a detailed *Assessment Plan* that maps the cycle for assessing these Student Learning Outcomes as well as for identifying measures; conducting pilot tests; administering instruments; and

analyzing, interpreting and disseminating results that carry assessment activities forward to 2012. This plan will help to ensure the continuity of this general education assessment effort while also serving as a model for expanding assessment into other areas."
HLC Report Comprehensive Evaluation Visit Assurance Section May 4, 2009 Page 13

CCSSE Administration
The chair of the committee coordinated the CCSSE assessment during the second half of March. A random selection of class sections was chosen by CCSSE administrators at the University of Texas and circulated to committee members. This sample takes into account both part-time and full-time students and splits students into cohorts based on the number of credit hours completed.

CCSSE survey packets were distributed and returned through the use of the Dean of Instruction's Office. There was a four-week window in which the surveys were completed and returned to the University of Texas. There was some mismatch between pre-selected sections and the survey packets that were received from CCSSE administrators. Despite this, completed surveys were returned on time and were adequate in numbers and specific sampling features for CCSSE to process the data and provide a full institutional report by the beginning of August 2009. The findings from this assessment will be exceptionally informative, since this is our second utilization of the CCSSE. This will allow us to give some comparative analysis from our 2005 CCSSE report. Further discussion of this assessment report is contained in specific section at the conclusion of this report.

Math Assessment Tool and Pilot
Assessment Committee members received the results of their pilot of the math assessment tool, edits and alterations were made based on this and the timeline for the student pilot was set out. Administration provided gift cards valued at $100, $50, and $25 to be awarded in a random drawing from student participants in the math pilot. The original plan for this pilot did not work well and it was rescheduled much closer to the end of the semester. The committee felt that incentives needed more close attention, so they worked to increase student participation in pilot activities without prejudicing the outcomes.

Research Resources Replenished
Towards the end of April the committee welcomed a new research assistant from the Office of Research and Development, Chris Kabir. He has added significant impetus to a number of current pieces of our work and his contribution has already helped speed up our capacity to process and analyze data. This has clearly addressed an area of committee concern about the large time lag between data collection and communicating the findings to all college stakeholders.

Speeding up the Assessment Cycle
The addition of new resources to our research capacities alongside the judicious use of special assignments for faculty, has led to a speedy processing of the

successful physical science assessment data. Committee members were funded to both process and analyze the collected data. The report of this assessment and the findings will be delivered to the college community in the fall semester of 2009. This means that the data collection and dissemination timeline for our hybrid physical sciences general education assessment has been one year; a considerable improvement on previous timescales.

CCSSE data were collected in spring semester 2009 and the findings, in a range of formats will also be disseminated in the fall of 2009. In both cases, the use of additional resources to support committee work has clearly impacted our capacity to feedback and feedforward to college stakeholders. It should be noted that the speed of the CCSSE assessment loop is, of course, paid for by the fee for this externally organized assessment.

Social Science Assessment Preparations
Initial work on formulating the student learning outcomes for the social science general education objectives began in earnest during the fall semester. With the aide of our research assistant and faculty using special assignments, this work moved quickly. The plan is to finalize these outcomes during our fall 2009 meetings.

Influence and Change
This semester, the committee received a request from the Erickson Institute to use of our committee-developed Diversity Assessment tool. This was granted with our usual stipulations about HWC attribution and sharing of implementation and results.

As per the committee charge nominations and elections were held for new officers for the upcoming academic year. Anita Kelley was thanked for her work and Michael Heathfield (Applied Science) will take over as Chair, supported by Todd Heldt (Library) with Christopher Sabino (Mathematics) continuing his sterling work as committee secretary.

Summer Assignments
As previously mentioned a number of key tasks were accomplished with the support of additional finances for faculty undertaking special assignments during the summer months. These assignments ensure that the work of the Assessment Committee runs throughout the calendar year. This allows us to give concentrated and targeted time to key tasks to maintain momentum on what has always been a somewhat ambitious timetable. It also allows some form of incentive and reward to faculty for their predominantly voluntary commitment to assessment and improving student learning at the college.

The special assignments awarded in the summer of 2009 allowed for the following tasks to be completed: Writing Across the Curriculum – researching appropriate assessment tools and methodologies; writing a faculty assessment guide; initial data analysis for our recent science assessment; ‘closing the loop’

on our humanities assessment report; and, the writing of this annual assessment report.

Community College Survey of Student Engagement 2009 Results
CCSSE is a 38 item indirect survey of student engagement which groups these items into five key benchmarks with a strong research base signifying their importance both as student behaviors and institutional practices contributing to 'effective teaching, student learning, student retention, and student success'.

CCSSE uses a three-year cohort model of colleges in the data analysis and computation of 'benchmark' scores. This cohort approach increases reliability and reduces the impact of statewide consortia data. Harold Washington College is in a consortium of 16 Illinois colleges and the full 2009 cohort represents data from 683 colleges.

The key benchmarks are:

- Active and Collaborative Learning
- Student Effort
- Academic Challenge
- Student-Faculty Interaction
- Support for Learners

In all five benchmark areas Harold Washington College students surpassed the mean score of 50 both in our 16-college Illinois consortium and the full national cohort. This important headline finding contains within it considerable specific detail, also showing many areas in which our students are significantly above the mean score. This statistical significance (significant at $p < .001$ with an effect size greater than or equal to .2) has considerable practical implications for improving student learning at a range of levels within the institution. More specific details of our results will be circulated as the committee interprets and communicates the detailed findings during the fall 2009 semester. These 2009 results must also be compared with our initial use of CCSSE in 2005. This will give us some institutional and internal comparative data about any changes with regard to student engagement.

The CCSSE report contains a mass of detail and provides a web-based research tool that allows us to work within an online database to produce statistical reports that are customized to our specific interests. These data need considerable exploration beyond this report and must be 'drilled down' much further to reveal the specific experiences of our students and our college context. Two summary and 'First Look' charts are presented here to give a flavor of our 2009 student engagement findings. There is much here for the institution to take pride in as it continues to work on assessment across the curriculum.

First Look CCSSE Results – Comparison:
Harold Washington College, Other Large Colleges & Full 2009 CCSSE Cohort

Δ = notably above the mean **V** = notably below the mean (significant at p < .001 with an effect size greater/equal to .2)	**All Students**		**Full-time Students**		**Part-time Students**		**0-29 Credit Students**		**30+ Credit Students**	
	Large Colleges	*Full 2009 Cohort*	*Large Colleges*	*Full 2009 Cohort*	*Large Colleges*	*Full 2009 Cohort*	*Large Colleges*	*Full 2009 Cohort*	*Large Colleges*	*Full 2009 Cohort*
Active & Collaborative Learning										
Made a class presentation	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ		
Worked with other students on projects during class	Δ	Δ			Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ		
Student Effort										
Number of books read on your own (not assigned)….	Δ	Δ			Δ	Δ		Δ	Δ	Δ
Frequency: Peer or other tutoring	Δ	Δ			Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ
Frequency: Computer lab	Δ								Δ	Δ
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in			Δ	Δ					Δ	Δ
Frequency: Skills lab (Writing, math, etc.)									Δ	Δ
Academic Challenge										
Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	Δ	Δ			Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ
Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	Δ	Δ			Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ		
Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory								Δ		

Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways									Δ	Δ
Mark the box which best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current school year have challenged you to do your best work at this college									Δ	
Student-Faculty Interaction										
Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework	Δ				Δ	Δ	Δ		Δ	
Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor				**V**					Δ	Δ
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class									Δ	Δ
Support for Learners										
Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ

First Look CCSSE Results – Comparison:
Harold Washington College, Illinois Consortium Colleges & Full 2009 CCSSE Cohort

Δ = notably above the mean **V** = notably below the mean (significant at p < .001 with an effect size greater/equal to .2)	**All Students**		**Full-time Students**		**Part-time Students**		**0-29 Credit Students**		**30+ Credit Students**	
	Illinois Colleges	*Full 2009 Cohort*	*Illinois Colleges*	*Full 2009 Cohort*	*Illinois Colleges*	*Full 2009 Cohort*	*Illinois Colleges*	*Full 2009 Cohort*	*Illinois Colleges*	*Full 2009 Cohort*
Active & Collaborative Learning										
Made a class presentation	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ		
Worked with other students on projects during class		Δ				Δ	Δ	Δ		
Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	Δ						Δ			
Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course									Δ	
Student Effort										
Number of books read on your own (not assigned)….	Δ	Δ				Δ		Δ	Δ	Δ
Frequency: Peer or other tutoring	Δ	Δ	Δ		Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ
Frequency: Computer lab									Δ	Δ
Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in			Δ	Δ					Δ	Δ
Frequency: Skills lab (Writing, math, etc.)									Δ	Δ
Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources									Δ	

Academic Challenge										
Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	Δ	Δ			Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ
Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	Δ	Δ			Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	
Numbers of written papers or reports of any length	Δ						Δ			
Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory								Δ		
Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences in new ways									Δ	Δ
Mark the box which best represents the extent to which your examinations during the current school year have challenged you to do your best work at this college									Δ	
Student-Faculty Interaction										
Worked with instructors on activities other than coursework					Δ	Δ			Δ	
Talked about career plans with an instructor or advisor				**V**					Δ	Δ
Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with instructors outside of class									Δ	Δ
Support for Learners										
Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ		Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ

Initial CCSSE Analysis

Harold Washington College students do particularly well in comparison to our Illinois college consortium partners, other large colleges and the full national CCSSE three-year cohort. The number of items significantly above the mean in the benchmark of active and collaborative learning shows that our investment in developing a culture of learning is paying off. These data also show our students do well investing real effort in their education. There is evidence here that specific aspects of critical thinking and deep learning approaches are strongly represented amongst our students. These effects increase as students achieve larger numbers of successful credits, as do the relationships with faculty and advisors. Our specific diverse urban context is also strongly evidenced here showing most all of our students encounter and positively engage with issues of diversity.

Our least effective benchmark area is in providing 'support for learners' beyond the great diversity of their experience here at college. Unsurprisingly, our students score above the mean in commuting to and from classes. However, there is also registered dissatisfaction with relationships between students and administrative personnel, academic advising and career counseling; this seems particularly true of full-time students. It should be noted that career-planning discussions with instructors *and* advisors are below the mean for full-time students when compared to our Illinois consortium, other large colleges and the full 2009 CCSSE cohort. These data clearly need considerably more exploration and discussion.

It is also important to not take our results out of their specific urban context. Our student population and our 2009 CCSSE respondents show key differences with the full 2009 CCSSE cohort. Harold Washington College has a very diverse student body. Our student population tends to be older than the national cohort and much more ethnically and racially diverse:

Race and Ethnicity	HWC Population	National CCSSE Cohort
Hispanic, Latino, Spanish	23%	14%
Black or African American, Non-Hispanic	39%	13%
Asian, Asian-American or Pacific Islander	13%	6%
White, Non-Hispanic	24%	58%

Our college environment is clearly very different and further data analysis must take account of this exceptionally vibrant urban context.

Conclusions

This has been a very successful academic year for the Assessment Committee in which voluntary faculty involvement has been maintained, indeed slightly increased, over the year. There has been the usual influx of new faculty, unsurprisingly and predominantly those seeking tenure. Maintaining seasoned and assessment-experienced faculty will remain a challenge into the future. The

workload is considerable since this committee meets more than any other on campus. The tasks are becoming increasingly complex as we begin to encounter the first full assessment cycle in which we have comparative data from two applications of the same assessment tool. How we interpret and utilize our Community College Study of Student Engagement findings will be a marker of both our committee and institutional maturity with regards to assessment findings.

The committee continues to build experience and expertise in a range of assessment areas. Administration commitment to supporting our activities and addressing our self-identified resource and skill gaps has been important in this year of our successful full 10-year re-accreditation. This must be maintained in the future as we continue with what remains an ambitious assessment agenda.

There are a numbers of other issues that will probably challenge us considerably in the upcoming year. We will need to become increasingly methodologically complex in our sampling procedures. All of our previous in-house assessments have utilized a simple numeric size sample to allow us to extrapolate to our wider student body. As student, faculty and administration lives become busier, more complex and demanding, we will need to explore a broader range of techniques for collecting student assessment data. This should include the dual-use of data that may already be collected through other auspices of the college.

Our future agenda should also include the exploration and use of more technologically complex assessment techniques and methodologies. While paper and pencil surveys have served our charge very well to date, they are certainly time and labor intensive; they do not address the newer forms of information gathering, sharing and analyzing that already exist. It may be that a good proportion of our student body is already more technologically advanced than some committee members.

The strength of the Assessment Committee remains that it is faculty led and implemented. Expanding faculty engagement will remain a challenge as we progress into the new academic year. How we communicate our work to all college stakeholders remains an area for the largest growth. As colleagues committed to the improvement of student learning, we must continue to see a central function of our charge as not the adequate communication of information about assessment, but the consistent increase in our role and impact as an important lever for change. How we build yet stronger student learning outcomes across our very diverse student and faculty body is central. How we use our assessment findings to stimulate positive change at the institution, department and classroom level is a refocused lens that the newly elected committee officers are happy to address. There is much in this annual report that supports the view that our strengths will ensure our challenges are encountered with creativity, commitment and ever-increasing expertise.

Mike Heathfield - September 2009