

**Harold Washington College
Assessment Committee Annual Report
Fall 2010 – Summer 2011**

Introduction

This has been a busy year for the Assessment Committee. This report summarizes and comments on the major activities and achievements of the committee. Particular attention is paid to faculty involvement in this voluntary contribution to the quality of collegiate life. Specific tasks, results, and challenges are presented, discussed and indicators for the future work of the committee are suggested as we embark on a significant turning point in the committee's history: the completion of a full cycle of assessment on all seven of the general education learning outcomes we have set for our students.

Participation Data

These data are presented to give some sense of the scale and scope of faculty and staff involvement in regular Assessment Committee meetings and also provide a comparison with last year's participation evidence.

Activity	Fall Semester 2009	Fall Semester 2010
Assessment Committee Standard Meetings	12	12
End of Semester Celebration	1	0
Lowest weekly meeting attendance	12	9
Highest weekly meeting attendance	18	18
<i>Average weekly meeting attendance</i>	15	15
Number of Departments and Offices represented	10	11
Regular contributing Departments and Offices were: Advising, Applied Science, Biology, English, Library, Math, Research and Planning, Physical Science, Social Science, Humanities and ELL/WL.		
It should be noted that during the fall semester of 2010 there was a significant drop in attendance after week 8 – from an average of 16 members to 13.		
Activity	Spring Semester 2010	Spring Semester 2011
Assessment Committee Standard Meetings	13	12
Assessment Week open presentations	3	0
Lowest weekly meeting attendance	10	11
Highest weekly meeting attendance	15	14
<i>Average weekly meeting attendance</i>	13	13
Number of Departments and Offices represented	10	11
Regular contributing Departments and Offices were: Advising, Applied Science, Biology, English, Library, Math, Research and Planning, Physical Science, Social Science, Humanities and ELL/WL.		

These data show a fairly consistent pattern of attendance at these weekly meetings. Fall semester always seems slightly stronger than spring but the committee retains broad support from most departments across the college.

The fall 2009 attendance increase of 20% from fall 2008 has been maintained, which is a good sign about the commitment of faculty and staff to the committee. The committee retains a diverse membership with a useful mix of long-term members and those new to the college or committee. This expertise mix works well and committee members make evaluative comments on both the communal history the committee represents and the specific learning opportunity for those earlier in their academic careers. The Assessment Committee also provides a strong, safe and consistent faculty development opportunity for all involved, and this aspect of the committee should not be underestimated. It represents the largest group of faculty and staff on campus who regularly and consistently focus their communal energy on student learning outcomes and how we can improve these. In this sense, the HWC Assessment Committee contributes directly to the District-wide focus on lifting student outcomes and success.

Faculty and staff are always challenged by the many demands on their time, so long-term commitment to this committee is truly appreciated. Fall semester 2011 will see the largest influx of new full-time faculty to HWC since 2006. Committee members and officers will invest time and energy in recruiting many of these to join the committee. We know from our own membership that tenure requirements may be the initiating force behind new faculty participation, but many stay after tenure is granted because they both enjoy and appreciate the work of the committee. Three have already indicated a desire to join the committee; we will welcome them.

Key Activities and Issues - Fall 2010

There were four key areas of activity in the fall semester supported through our subcommittee structure. These were: preparing for Assessment Week and our Social Science assessment, planning and preparation for our Effective Writing assessment which will collect data in the fall semester of 2011, finalizing our Quantitative Reasoning report, and dissemination and communication of assessment findings and artifacts. Committee members were distributed fairly evenly across these subcommittees and a key committee member was assigned informal leadership of each of these areas of activity. These four primary subcommittees differed considerably in both the amount of work they had to undertake and the output of their efforts.

Social Science Assessment

This subcommittee was led by Lynnel Kiely and had specific specialized support in this semester from Chris Kabir (Research and Planning), Ephrem Rabin (Blackboard consultant) and Vincent Wiggins (OIT). This assessment was our first full online assessment and required considerable specialized support for us to achieve our goal of 1,000 student respondents during Assessment Week.

A number of key decisions were made in advance of data gathering in Assessment Week, which would turn out to be fortuitous in the light of some of the technical difficulties we encountered in using Blackboard as our assessment platform. Two key decisions were:

- To enter the potential 1,200 student volunteers into daily 'classes' on the blackboard system, thus separating out each daily data set.
- To create and print a hard copy of the assessment tool, should the internet, and our technical capabilities, fail us when we had an assessment room full of student volunteers.

We used our usual system of recruiting faculty to volunteer their class sections to meet our target of 1,000 student participants and to bring them at pre-scheduled times to the assessment room where they could be proctored while completing the online assessment tool. This methodology was to prove again most successful in obtaining a large enough sample of student participants to achieve the important 10% of registered students. Achieving this minimum sample size allows our results to be representative of our general student body during that semester. The initial sample size turned out to be 12.3% of our student population.

For the first time we also offered students and faculty the option of completing the assessment in an unproctored setting. Since the assessment tool was hosted online using Blackboard, faculty could volunteer student sections and allow them to complete this at will, and from any location, during assessment week by logging on to Blackboard and following the specific instructions online. This also allowed us to schedule more student participation without physically overbooking our 75 reserved spaces in the main computer room (404) during Assessment Week. This also meant we could schedule volunteered sections to complete the assessment with faculty in other rooms on campus with computer access. A small number of faculty added the completion of the Social Science Assessment into the grading profile of their courses in the fall, thus encouraging student participation. This was done since we were able to promise a record of participation to let these faculty know who had completed the assessment, and thus it could be used in the grading profile for their students.

Considerable planning and faculty engagement is involved in data collection in Assessment Week and this semester was no exception. Committee members proctored the computer room for over forty hours during Assessment Week. Additionally, forty faculty volunteered their class sections to take the Social Science Assessment. The breakdown of this voluntary activity was as follows:

Assessment Room – 404 – Scheduled Student and Faculty participation		
Monday November 8th 2010		
13 sections involving 12 faculty	Maximum Students = 342	@ 70% = 239
Tuesday November 9th 2010		
13 sections involving 13 faculty	Maximum Students = 330	@ 70% = 231
Wednesday November 10th 2010		
10 sections involving 9 faculty	Maximum Students = 289	@ 70% = 202
Thursday November 11th 2010		
5 sections involving 5 faculty	Maximum Students = 118	@ 70% = 83
Friday November 12th 2010		
1 section involving 1 faculty	Maximum Students = 21	@ 70% = 15

Saturday November 13th 2010		
1 section involving 1 faculty	Maximum Students = 30	@ 70% = 21
At-home and at any time Assessments		
7 sections involving 5 faculty	Maximum Students = 222	@ 70% = 155
In-class assessments – not 404		
4 sections involving 4 faculty	Maximum Students = 94	@ 70% = 66
Planned Student and Faculty involvement in Assessment Week		
40 faculty volunteering a potential 1,446 student respondents		
Student attendance estimated at 70% of full class roster		1,012

Historically, over a number of assessments, we have found that class size shrinks as the term progresses and that faculty volunteered classes always deliver less students than their original registration numbers. Our previous assessments lead us to use a 70% student participation rate. This allows us to better estimate actual student respondents, since Assessment Week takes place in week twelve of semester. This participation rate allowed us to heavily schedule the assessment room to manage our limited resources to achieve our target of 1,000 student respondents. In actuality, by the end of Assessment Week we had completed assessments from 977 students, representing 67.5% of potential volunteered student participants. So our 70% participation rate from faculty volunteered section still stands and should guide us in the future when planning for potential student respondents, and the required resources to manage both the people and data generated by them.

The participant figure just missed the target through no-show volunteered sections on the first day of Assessment Week. Faculty had many reminders but a few require a physical reminder during their teaching time! Assessment Committee proctors need to be assertive at this time and visit classrooms to remind busy faculty. This was only an issue on the first day of Assessment Week. However, there were a number of other challenges we encountered with our first full on-line assessment.

Technical and Human Challenges

To our knowledge, Blackboard has never been loaded with classes of such large size, in some cases over 300 students. As Assessment Week progressed we encountered various problems with slow internet or slow Blackboard responses. At these times proctoring staff resorted to paper copies of the questionnaire. This saved us on a number of occasions but certainly caused some frustration with students. For some students the technical glitches were at the outset of the questionnaire and for others further into the data gathering process. In the later cases students switched to paper and pencil when problems arose, thus leaving us with student data in a mix of electronic and paper formats. Without the supportive resources of Research and Evaluation this would have been lost data. Considerable time was spent manually entering paper responses into the excel spreadsheet containing all respondent data. It is not known how much time was spent entering this data into the excel spreadsheets, but this task was conducted by Kris Kabir over the fall holiday break while faculty were away.

When we ran the pilot of the questionnaire in the summer semester of 2010, we decided that it was too long and reduced three substantive areas of questioning to two. None of the technical problems we encountered during Assessment Week were identified during the small scale pilot involving 5 sections and 234 students. Through a human and technical error with our data, we also lost a full day of data, representing some 241 students reducing the representativeness of our sample. Further specific details of these technical and methodological challenges will be explored in the full Social Science Assessment Report due in spring 2012. Although Social Science assessment data gathering was a complex and challenging procedure, we learned a great deal about future use of online methodologies and the current limits of our technical capabilities; this learning should not be underestimated and builds significantly our methodological diversity and expertise. We have not yet managed to fully escape from paper and pencil technologies.

Effective Writing Assessment Preparation

The full committee approved the Effective Writing student learning outcomes at the September 22nd 2010 meeting, and they were as follows:

Student Learning Outcomes for the writing portion of the General Education requirements - Students will be able to:

1. Compose texts across multiple disciplines and for various audiences, occasions, and purposes;
2. Construct texts for communication, information and expression which adhere to the rules of Standard Written English;
3. Compose texts that are focused, well-organized, and well-developed.

There were also additional questions the subcommittee debated which informed the methodological decisions made about the data collection process. These questions concerned whether technology could influence writing, if handwriting quality was important, and if first or final drafts of writing samples would be useful for assessing our stated outcomes. These were complex conversations in which there was considerable debate and disagreement; a natural, productive and sometimes painful part of our committee process. This continued into the spring semester, when a pilot of our methodology was scheduled to occur.

Quantitative Reasoning Report

The Assessment Committee will formally approve this report in the fall semester of 2011, a full two years after the data was gathered. This was not a speedy process and one that highlighted some of the challenges of our whole assessment process when at times it rests on the busy schedules of individual faculty members. While our subcommittee system shares tasks and workloads well amongst committee members, we have yet to find a viable communal data analysis and report writing process. This was a writing challenge for the committee, as noted in last year's Annual Report the data grading and analysis was actually one of the fastest processes we have managed, supported by

speedy and quickly delivered special assignments for Assessment Committee graders.

A full dissemination process and campus dialogue about the findings of this assessment will begin in the fall semester of 2011. A range of artifacts will be produced from these findings to engage faculty, administrators and students in dialogue about how we can improve our students' capabilities in quantitative reasoning. Key findings from 'Comfort, Complexity and Competence: Quantitative Reasoning at Harold Washington College', were:

- Our students self-reported being the least comfortable with math amongst five subjects (reading, writing, arts, science and math) recording a mean of 1.72 on a three-point scale. Reading recorded the highest comfort score of 2.35.
- Our students identify *reading* and *understanding* as the most important skills required to be successful in math and that hard work is a primary driver for success.
- Our students believe there is a level of expertise required for successful math skills, that this has to be *acquired*, and that these skills are discreet and unconnected from both themselves and other academic disciplines.
- Our students are unable to see much connection between math skills and broader aspects of their lives.
- Our students were the most competent at interpreting visually presented data and least competent at using percentages.
- Students who reported as not having repeated a math class at HWC did statistically significantly better on quantitative reasoning competency than students who reported as having repeated a math class at HWC.

We had assumed a linear and sequential progression in math skills as students progressed through increasing levels of math sequence courses. This proved to be an incorrect assumption. Students were asked to identify their math level according to three cohorts of math classes, which were then methodologically used to create three analytical groupings:

- Cohort 1: FS Math 3001-3002 and Math 098,099
- Cohort 2: Math 118, 121, 122, 125, 140
- Cohort 3: Math 141,144, 146, 204, 207, 208, 209, 210, 212

The mean competence scores out of 24 for each cohort were as follows:

Cohort	Mean Score (Out of 24)
Cohort 1	10.637
Cohort 2	12.166
Cohort 3	11.223

In comparing the statistical difference in the mean scores of each cohort, we used a method called an "inference about two means of independent samples". This method results in a p-value, which is a common measurement of statistical

significance, with lower p-values representing higher statistical significance. Chosen cut-off values for significance vary according to context, but most often 0.10, 0.05, or 0.01 are used. For our quantitative reasoning data, we used a moderate cut-off value of 0.05, meaning p-values of 0.05 or less represent statistical significance, and p-values of greater than 0.05 represent lack of statistical significance.

The resulting p-values for comparing the mean scores among cohorts thus were:

Statistical Comparison	P-Value
Increase From Cohort 1 (10.637) to Cohort 2 (12.166)	0.000000018
Decrease From Cohort 2 (12.166) to Cohort 3 (11.223)	0.015
Increase From Cohort 1 (10.637) to Cohort 3 (11.223)	0.071

First, in considering the increase in mean competence scores from cohort 1 to cohort 2, the p-value of 0.000000018 shows that students in cohort 2 did statistically significantly better than students in cohort 1. Furthermore, because the p-value is so low, the level of significance is extremely high.

In comparing cohort 2 to cohort 3, not only did cohort 2 do better than cohort 3 on average, but cohort 2 did statistically significantly better than cohort 3, with a significant p-value of 0.015. This is perhaps one of the most surprising results of the entire assessment. This may be due to students in the middle math classes best remembering the concepts included in this assessment. It also may be possible that students in higher-level math classes, as represented in cohort 3, are embedded in more complex mathematical skills and thus are more distant from the basic skills tested by the assessment.

Also surprising is the lack of significant rise in score from cohort 1 to cohort 3. Students in cohort 3 scored better than cohort 1 on average, but the p-value of 0.071 is not statistically significant compared to a cut-off of 0.05. We would have expected students in the highest math classes to score much higher than students in the lowest math classes, but the difference in score was actually minor. More detailed description and analysis of the Quantitative Reasoning Assessment can be found in the full report. Our findings will form the basis of healthy dialogue amongst math faculty and faculty in general as we present them in various formats in the fall semester of 2011.

Dissemination of Assessment Findings

This was a year in which our work slowed somewhat and deadlines slipped as tasks took considerably longer than originally anticipated and planned. This was, in large part, due to an ambitious schedule that rested on considerable faculty time allocated to assessment tasks.

The Assessment Times was produced and circulated around campus. The committee again discussed utilizing a broader range of communication artifacts and strategies to engage the wider HWC community in assessment related dialogue. The committee had already decided that workshops and

presentations, within HWC for Assessment Week or Faculty Development Week, were not useful and were a waste of committee members' preparation time, since attendance had historically been so poor. We were also aware of the need to reach out to students about our assessment activity; this resulted in a feature article in The Herald about the committee during the fall semester. The student reporter noted with surprise the amount and level of work the committee undertook, something about which she knew nothing. It is not known whether her article helped our profile amongst the student body at large.

We also used our classroom posters and color elevator banners in the weeks prior to Assessment Week to try to build a profile on campus and encourage participation for data gathering for the Social Science Assessment. In reality, we just missed our target of 1,000 students and were not able to repeat the participation we achieved for the Quantitative Reasoning Assessment the previous year, which involved 1,132 student respondents from an originally scheduled 65 faculty volunteered sections. This drop is clearly related to engaging enough faculty in volunteering their classes to take part in assessment activities. This is something we will have to consider deeply as we approach Assessment Week in fall of 2011 and seek faculty engagement for our Effective Writing Assessment. Since we gain access to student respondents through faculty volunteers, this should be our primary focus in the fall. Incentives to students, at-a-distance online assessments, assessments as part of course grading profiles, and a host of classroom and campus publicity materials have not, as yet, appeared effective in stimulating independent student engagement in our assessment activities. Our successful primary methodology remains accessing students through volunteered faculty sections.

The committee also wanted to revisit our website and ensure this became consistently updated and provide a broader means of communicating our activities, findings and recommendations. Unfortunately, this task was not fully achieved during the fall semester.

Key Activities and Issues - Spring 2011

At the end of fall semester 2010 Todd Heldt stepped down as Vice-Chair of the Assessment Committee and Jennifer Asimow agreed to temporarily fill the role. Jennifer was the first Chair of the HWC Assessment Committee and this is the first time a previous officer has returned to an official role within the committee.

This semester would turn out to be a somewhat frustrating one for the committee, with both internal and external challenges to be overcome in keeping our work on task, time and supported.

Communication and Dissemination

We successfully initiated two new communication routes this semester. For the first time ever The Assessment Times was produced in two versions: one for faculty and staff, and one specifically targeted at students. Of course, it is not known how this was received or how many students read this edition of

Assessment Times. Our original plan was to have this as a special insert in an edition of The Herald, but despite committee members being prepared to spend the physical time achieving this, it proved not possible. We would still like to pursue the possibility of student-centered assessment information inserts in The Herald. However, we should continue to produce an Assessment Times that specifically speaks to students; an important broadening of our dialogic reach on campus.

This semester we also began producing Podcasts of conversations with the Assessment Chair posted on the Harold Lounge. The original plan was to do these weekly, but we settled into a bi-weekly sequence of conversations hosted by Dave Richardson. The purpose was to provide another access route for faculty and others to the current work of the committee and the range of academic and practical work we undertake. We learned the shorter five-minute conversations got more hits. This innovation should continue into the new academic year, delivering Assessment Committee podcasts as part of our strategy of widening our reach and diversifying our audience through targeted artifacts.

Under this same strategy we also decided to instigate a cartoon strip presenting in a humorous fashion the decisions, challenges and work of the committee. There were a range of very funny storylines outlined by some members of the group, but unfortunately we were not able to find a student or faculty member able to produce the actual cartoon strip. This remains an interesting idea and one that we should still pursue. A regular, funny and informative cartoon strip in the Herald would surely help the understandably low student profile we currently have.

Social Science Assessment Tool Grading

Our plan for grading the social science assessment data was carefully worked out by the subcommittee, with a planned use of ten graders from both outside and within the committee. This has been a common practice when we have assessed student learning outcomes through the use of committee-created tools.

We have maintained continued success in the utilization of a broad diversity of assessment tools, including:

- Externally created and paid for tools;
- Externally created and at-no-cost tools;
- Adapted external at-no-cost tools;
- Mixed tools combining elements of permission-granted external tools and self-created elements; and,
- Internally created tools fully contextualized to HWC.

The decision to create our own assessment tool is frequently driven by three key conditions. Firstly, a search of available tools from other academic institutions has yielded very limited results. Secondly, potential assessment tools are restricted in validity because of our specific student body and large urban

context. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, external assessment tools do not collect enough data that match our specific and institutionally defined student learning outcomes.

The first section of our questionnaire used nine multiple-choice questions asking students to identify and differentiate between the different social sciences by recognizing key terms and concepts demonstrated in a written pseudo-conversation between social scientists. The second section of the questionnaire contained nine multiple choice demographic, affective and academic status questions. Since the full questionnaire was managed through Blackboard, both these sections required no additional faculty time in grading and initial data analysis.

The third and final section of our Social Science Assessment tool asked students to demonstrate more complex skills such as application, analysis and synthesis. The special assignment requests referred specifically to the substantive and time-consuming work required in analyzing these data. There were six specific questions in this element of the assessment that required additional time in grading to ascertain the level of student capabilities with regard to our student learning outcomes. There were 4,000 narrative answers in excel spreadsheets that required trained graders to judge the value of these responses and thus convert these qualitative data into quantitative, to ease the analysis and dissemination of findings.

We recruited a deliberate disciplinary mix of faculty for which special assignments were completed, gaining approval through the usual HWC procedure; however, these were not approved at District. The \$10,000 cost was thought too much, especially in the light of the fact that we had no accurate concept of the actual time it might take graders to complete this task. It was indicated that a figure of \$5,000 might be more realistic. This caused considerable discussion and frustration for some committee members who saw this as a withdrawing of much needed support for Assessment Committee activities. District made very clear that this was not the case, but that a challenged funding environment would continue to force changes to some long-established practices.

A new plan involving only 4 graders on special assignments of \$1,200, all from within committee membership, was devised and data spreadsheets were reconfigured for this new strategy. Training for inter-rater reliability took place towards the end of semester and grading was primarily completed by the end of July. The discussion, revision and completion of all requirements for these additional resources for our assessment work, essentially added a semester of time to our social science assessment process. This issue caused considerable debate within the committee and generated a range of creative solutions from within faculty and administration for future support of our assessment work. These will be discussed in the conclusion to this report.

Effective Writing Pilot and Preparation for Assessment Week

The grading rubric for organically generated student writing samples was approved by the full committee on March 23rd and a pilot plan to gather student writing samples from seven to ten class sections was instigated. All of these volunteered sections came from within committee membership, thus allowing a fairly speedy process of data collection.

The Effective Writing subcommittee also outlined a plan for the first half of the fall semester 2011 in preparation for Assessment Week during which we will gather a full sample of student writing on which to base our assessment. The plan includes using committee time to grade pilot writing samples and to ensure we systematically account for faculty time in grading writing samples for this assessment. If we maintain our recent target sample size of 1,000 students for a full representative assessment, the grading of all this student work will require considerable additional resources. In the light of recent special assignment restrictions and changes in institutional staffing for Research and Planning, this will require much creativity on behalf of the Assessment Committee in maintaining the level of quality of our work to undertake such a labor-intensive task.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This has been an intriguing, creative and challenging year for the HWC Assessment Committee. The three key officers were elected by acclamation at the April 6th meeting for the next full academic year. These were: Michael Heathfield, Chair (Applied Sciences), Jennifer Asimow, Vice-Chair (Applied Sciences) and Jeffrey Swigart, Secretary (Mathematics). We have covered considerable ground as we close in on the first full cycle of assessment of all seven areas of student learning outcomes within our charge. We have broadened our range of methods of engagement and communication with the college community and we have sustained consistent faculty support across a number of years. Despite some technical challenges, we continue to be adept at collecting significant data on our students' approaches to learning and their direct skills within discreet disciplines. The specific details of all these are contained within our individual reports, which are circulated widely and will be available publicly through the Assessment Committee website. Beyond these focused reports there are broader assessment issues that are appropriate to record and highlight in our annual report. It is intended that these indicate both our continued commitment to the importance of assessing student learning outcomes and to maintaining a problem-solving orientation that has served us so well in the past.

System-wide learning

Of course, finding the strengths and the gaps in HWC student capabilities with regard to our general education curriculum has implications across our seven-college system. Whilst, as far as we know, we have no comparative City College data with regard to general education learning outcomes, our findings can establish both a framework and an agenda for system-wide dialogue about

general education outcomes and over-arching issues that are best addressed in a multi-campus format. It is certainly a fair critique to note that the general education assessment programs of each campus operate somewhat within college-bound silos and that our institutional knowledge could be improved when our seven campuses create data sharing and dialogue strategies that transcend the boundaries of our current institutional geography.

It remains vital that individual colleges maintain and build Independent, autonomous, context-specific assessment strategies but it is also important to ask how as a unified college system we can become system-wide knowledge builders to improve systemic student learning outcomes. Harold Washington College Assessment Committee is interested in exploring how we do this in an empowering, collegial and voluntary way. There is also interest in exploring how our assessment activities and findings can coordinate and match with larger-scale views of essential college level student learning outcomes.

A strong example of this broader view is represented by “The Degree Qualifications Profile’ from the Lumina Foundation (January 2011). This new model proposes specific student competencies in five key areas: Applied Learning, Broad Integrative Knowledge, Specialized Knowledge, Intellectual Skills, and Civic Learning. There is certainly a mission-match between the purposes of the Foundation, the document, HWC and the Assessment Committee. Exploring this new model would mitigate against some of the challenges our current and historical general education framework presents:

- Assessment that only captures discreet and highly segmented outcomes;
- Data and findings that speak only to one institution at one point of time;
- Lack of overview and synthesis of our understanding of HWC students’ learning; and,
- Restricted connection to broader domains, issues and strategies for improving student learning through assessment.

Whatever framework we may explore, as part of this new phase in our assessment history, the committee will want to ensure autonomy in selecting outcomes and the central capacity to contextualize learning to our specific students and institution. We would also want to avoid the pitfalls of benchmarking and standardized testing. However, revisiting all of our student outcomes, at this time, and finding a broader sense of connectivity, would be a productive step in our maturation and expertise. Exploring the broader purpose and value of a strong general education as demonstrated through assessed student outcomes, seems opportune and perfectly in harmony with our broader mission.

In a political environment where accountability and responsibility seem likely to remain pertinent and contentious issues, perhaps we have an obligation to make our contribution to this important dialogue beyond our specific institution. The HWC Assessment Committee can certainly contribute to a broader dialogue,

based on our evidence, about our student capabilities and the important educational, personal and civic value of the student learning we provide.

Report Writing

For as long as this Chair can remember specific assessment report writing has always been an onerous and time-consuming task for assessment committee faculty to undertake. From the Humanities report, through the Natural Sciences, Quantitative Reasoning, imminent Social Sciences and Effective Writing reports, it has been a resource-intensive challenge for a committee membership that is entirely voluntary. This seems especially so for newer faculty without a terminal degree who are more likely to carry a full teaching load and have post-graduate level course completion requirements as part of their contractual obligations. Assessment report writing has been historically supported through special assignments and will continue to need additional resources from within the institution for this important task to be maintained.

Marshalling Resources

In the light of our restrictive funding environment and the special assignment challenges outlined above, the committee and HWC administration are seeking a range of new strategies to support our crucial assessment work. HWC administration has consistently maintained strong support for assessment activities, indeed we are about to enter our third year where all three committee officers have received teaching remission for their Assessment Committee officer roles. This must be maintained. The Vice President for Academic Affairs has, for the first time, itemized a specific budget line item for Assessment Committee activities. This will help us plan and make informed choices about where and when we need to put additional resources to deliver on our charge. Committee members have also suggested a budget-free option through which faculty can be supported in time-consuming and specific assessment tasks beyond the regular weekly committee related activities.

All faculty have contractual requirements for registration hours to be used usually at the ends and beginnings of semester and during vacation periods, the same timeframes during which many faculty are available for additional assessment tasks. It is proposed that HWC special assignments can be drawn up for assessment committee members to utilize their registration hours for specific itemized assessment committee tasks. This would require little more than some administrative supervision and is a cost-free strategy for supporting assessment committee tasks. It has certainly been true that special assignments have helped us move more quickly with data and reach critical points of dissemination and collaboration for organically generated change strategies.

Research and Planning Support

The centralization of these important resources, while fiscally and managerially sensible from a District perspective may turn out to be practically restrictive with the day-to-day, 'here and now' expertise needed to support our assessment

activities. Having an active member of the committee from Research and Planning, on a weekly basis, has been unbelievably helpful in moving our work forward. Much administrative work, data management and organization and expertise sharing has occurred through these regular and localized relationships.

Since 2006, the committee has made regular requests for consistent and sustained research support and this has been exceptionally helpful over the past few years. HWC administration and the Assessment Committee will need to create solutions about how many of these support tasks can be replaced as our larger research and planning functions and staff have moved to District. A simple example of this would be that we now have no-one on staff who has the computer program and knowledge to use the scanning machine that automatically reads the demographic section of our assessment tools.

Maintaining a Qualitative Capacity

What students learn; how they know, show and share their knowledge and skills, are the vital keys to both college success and success in the world of work. This understanding requires us to be able to manage both quantitative and qualitative data.

Qualitative data are important in any assessment profile as they give a depth of student response and allow for the demonstration of competencies in significantly different ways. These qualitative data deepen our understanding of student capabilities and help us look at their real skills through seeing their knowledge in action; as applied to key issues, their own lives and experiences. Qualitative data require more intense and supported time to process and analyze, and thus are more faculty resource intense. Different assessments require different levels of institutional investment. It seems sensible that more algorithmic disciplines and outcomes lend themselves to quantitative approaches and thus require less time invested in data processing and analysis. Our experience has been that more heuristic disciplines and outcomes require additional resources for processing and analysis; human capacities are irreplaceable in this regard and assessing narrative data is crucial to our understanding. As our human and other resource capabilities shift and change, we must be conscious of maintaining this important capacity for our assessment activities.

A New Five-Year Plan

This upcoming semester, we are presented with a wonderful opportunity to build our communal knowledge by revisiting previous assessments; to use our knowledge and expertise as improved action for stronger student outcomes. We will be creating a new plan for our assessment program as we assess Effective Writing and complete a full cycle of general education outcomes. This presents us a wonderful opportunity to undertake some long range planning and formalize our assessment agenda over a much longer timeframe.

This is a time for reflection, reiteration and recreation of a broader assessment view. We are rightly, and frequently, buried in the minutiae and specifics of

individualized assessments so that we can understand our students' learning in detail and in depth. At this point in our communal history we look forward to planning our activities over the longer term and prioritizing anew how we conduct our business. We also look forward to improving our connectivity to some broader purposes and goals.

Reinvigorating Assessment Impetus

Our Effective Writing Assessment will soon be upon us and we are using a new and untested methodology. Therefore, it is imperative we begin to reach out to faculty immediately to prepare for this in week twelve and reverse the recent decline in faculty participation in Assessment Week data gathering. We have a great deal of institutional knowledge and many practical recommendations that are the fruit of considerable assessment activity over the past few years. And yet there is still much more to do. We have not yet managed to capitalize on our Community College Survey of Student Engagement findings, a national assessment tool which we have used in 2005 and 2009. This task receives an even greater emphasis since the District is planning to use the same tool across all seven campuses, we believe in 2013.

There is also, rightly, a renewed emphasis on increasing the number of community college students who exit with a recognized credential and an outcome that has value both in the marketplace and as a contributing member of society. Assessment activities support this focus and engage in systematic research to unpack the nuanced specifics of learning with regard to our general education curriculum. Successfully exiting HWC degree and transfer students have awards that are primarily made up of general education courses. Success in our range of general education courses is central to any final exit award. Our assessment program helps faculty, staff and students identify specific changes we can implement to improve student learning outcomes leading to student success. It is a data-driven process in which detail, time and additional resources make a huge difference to the quality, speed and utility of our findings. The HWC Assessment Committee has a strong history of success in which methodological, analytical and practical decisions have had impact within our institution. We look forward to our continued development and delivery of an institutional assessment program that works for students, staff and faculty.

Mike Heathfield
Assessment Committee Chair
August 2011