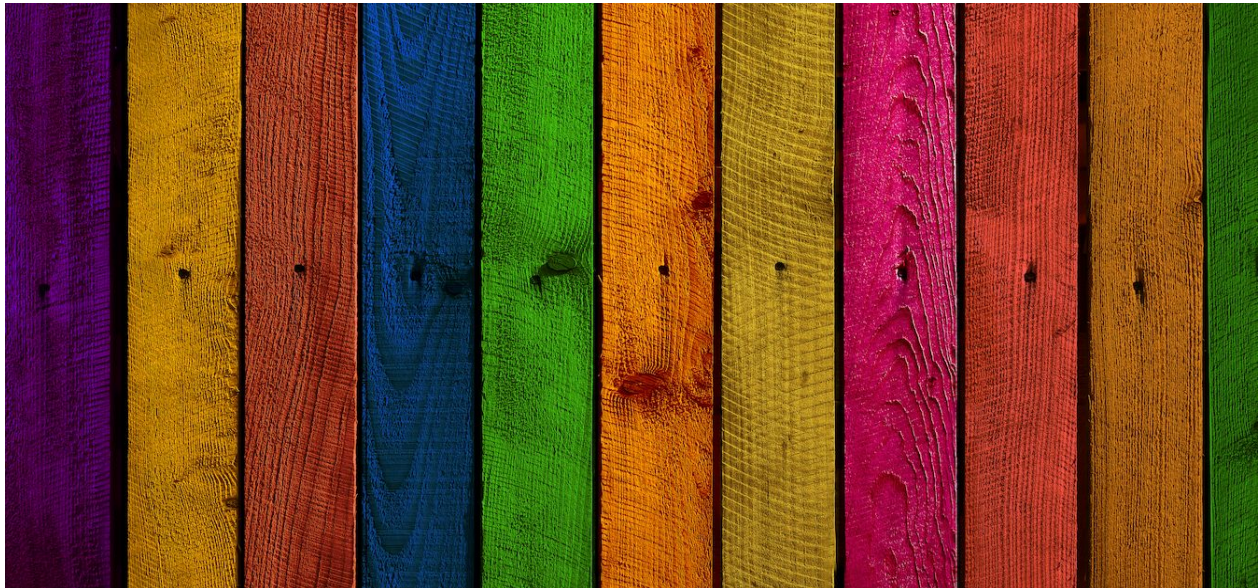


# **“Faculty truly own the assessment process at HWC”!**

## **An annual report of the HWC Assessment Committee for fall 2018 through spring 2019**

Harold Washington College Assessment Committee

<http://www.ccc.edu/hwcassessment>



(Picture by geralt via Pixabay)

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# Committee Membership

## Executive Committee

- Chair (Fall 2018): Carrie Nepstad, Social & Applied Science (with Jeffrey Swigart)\*
- Chair (Spring 2019): Jeffrey Swigart, Mathematics
- Vice Chair Unit-Level Assessment: Erica McCormack, Humanities & Music
- Vice Chair General Education (Fall 2018): Jeffrey Swigart, Mathematics
- Vice Chair General Education (Spring 2019): Carrie Nepstad, Social & Applied Science
- Secretary: Yev Lapik, Biology
- Research Analyst: Fernando Miranda-Mendoza

## Coordinators

- Online Learning (Fall 2018): Jennifer Asimow, Social and Applied Science
- Online Learning (Spring 2019): Yev Lapik, Biology
- Cocurricular Assessment (Fall 2018): Jeffrey Swigart (with Carrie Nepstad)
- Cocurricular Assessment (Spring 2019): Michael Heathfield

\*In fall 2018, Carrie Nepstad and Jeffrey Swigart swapped many roles of the chair and cocurricular coordinator to allow Carrie to focus on the accreditation visit from the Higher Learning Commission.

## Unit-Level Assessment Liaisons

- Art and Architecture: Paul Wandless
- Biology: Aigerim Bijelic
- Business (Fall 2018): Bral Spight
- Business (Spring 2019): Bridgette Mahan
- English, Speech, and Theatre (Fall 2018): Amy Rosenquist
- English, Speech, and Theatre (Spring 2019): Kristin Bivens
- Humanities and Music: David Richardson
- Library: Todd Heldt
- Mathematics: Camelia Salajean
- Physical Science: Allan Wilson
- Social and Applied Science: Domenico Ferri
- World Languages/ELL: Matthew Williams

## Membership

- Loretta Visomirskis, English, Speech, and Theatre
- Jennifer Vogel, Advising
- Vincent Wiggins, Office of Instruction

## Regular Guests

- Alison Place - SAS/ Erikson Institute



## Introduction

The Harold Washington College Assessment Committee (HWCAC) had exciting fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters. In the fall 2018, we helped our college with its accreditation visit from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The spring 2019 semester gave us a chance to reflect on our committee's history since 2003 and to prepare for some potentially big changes. Throughout both semesters, we worked on a variety of projects ranging from specific (unit-level projects) to broad (general education assessments), and we involved many others throughout our college community. This annual report highlights these projects while also directing the reader to more specific reports on our webpage. The section on accreditation contains the most detail since that information appears nowhere else.

## Unit Assessment

Unit assessment liaisons work on projects according to the specific needs of their departments. Here is a brief summary of their work; full reports are available in the [unit assessment section of our webpage](#).

- **Art and Architecture:** Paul Wandless worked with colleagues to develop ceramics assessments for Art 196 and Art 197. He also worked with Stephanie Burke on assessing black and white photography.
- **Biology:** Aigerim Bijelic worked with her department to choose 20 core concepts to assess in Biology 121, the intro course for majors. This helped to identify common misconceptions, and department members developed a response plan based on those findings, including covering such problematic concepts earlier in courses.
- **Business:** Bral Spight oversaw an attitudinal survey comparing students' perceptions from early on in their business program versus in the latter stages.
- **English, Speech, and Theatre:** In fall 2018, Amy Rosenquist conducted an indirect assessment by researching student perceptions around English 102 retention. In spring 2019, Kristin Bivens gathered data from English 96 portfolios, English 101 exit exams, and English 102 research papers to consider how they align, with the goal of developing common outcomes and rubrics for a direct assessment.
- **Humanities and Music:** David Richardson continued revising the music jury rubrics to improve consistency among faculty. He also worked on assessing philosophy students' skills in evaluating the quality of an argument.
- **Library:** Todd Heldt developed assessments on various information literacy skills, including Boolean operators in web searching.
- **Mathematics:** In fall 2018, Camelia Salajean assessed Math 118, the general education math class, specifically looking for common outcomes that all instructors cover. In Spring 2019 she began work on Math 140 (College Algebra).
- **Physical Science:** Allan Wilson assessed students' skills in answering open-ended questions in stoichiometry and other topics compared to multiple choice questions.

- **Social and Applied Science:** Domenico Ferri worked with colleagues on departmental student learning outcomes about civic engagement. He also surveyed students on civic engagement experiences in their classes.
- **World Languages/ELL:** In fall 2018, Matthew Williams assessed the speech-giving skills of students in Speech 98, 99, and 100. In Spring 2019, he began working with Andrew Cutcher on the accuracy of student pronunciation of consonant and vowel sounds in French. They worked with students using open source computer software to analyze digital recordings of the sounds.

## General Education Assessment

Our general education branch assesses learning outcomes that apply across the college's various disciplines. We usually do this by collecting general education data each fall and analyzing that data the following spring. Below is a summary of this academic year's work, with more detail in the [general education section of our webpage](#).

- **Humanities:** After collecting data in fall 2016, David Richardson worked with Phillip Vargas on several rounds of analysis and report writing. Throughout fall 2018, he shared often during our committee meetings about the final stages of his writing. In spring 2019, we approved [the humanities report](#). One of his many recommendations was to begin redesigning the way we assess general education.
- **Quantitative Reasoning:** After data collection in fall 2017, Fernando Miranda-Mendoza analyzed the data and then helped Jeffrey Swigart to complete the [quantitative reasoning report](#), which we approved in spring 2019. One of the themes we assessed in the general education population was the skill of recognizing purposefully misleading graphs. In the following months, various committee members often shared examples of suspicious graphs they saw on the news, on the web, or even in college-wide meetings.
- **Civic Engagement:** After developing a tool in spring 2018 and piloting the tool in summer 2018, we prepared to collect data throughout fall 2018. During final preparations, Carrie Nepstad met with the director of student activities, Angela Guernica, to make a list of student clubs to use in a question in the survey. Throughout October, we finalized the survey into a Google Form and discussed how to recruit faculty volunteers to involve their students. In early November, we made the form live and started sending mass emails to faculty and students, and we also made more personal one-on-one requests to our colleagues to be involved. We continued collecting responses into December 2018. In spring 2019, Fernando Miranda-Mendoza began the analysis with Carrie helping with the qualitative analysis. The full report is forthcoming.
- **Redesign:** In Spring 2019, after our successful reaffirmation visit from the HLC, Carrie Nepstad initiated redesigning our general education assessment practices. Specifically, based on HLC feedback, she hoped to shrink the 7-year calendar to allow us to assess topics more often. To achieve this, she thought we should strive toward deeper but smaller assessments that can be more easily planned. She also thought it may be time to redesign general education outcomes originally written in the early 2000's by faculty working with Cecilia Lopez. The actual redesign will be






explored in the fall 2019 and spring 2020 semesters.

## Other Committee Work

- **Online:** Throughout fall 2018, Jen Asimow investigated why students in online foreign language courses had more positive overall attitudes toward online classes. She found that these specific courses were externally designed, and so she further investigated the benefits of external course platforms. She also worked on a protocol for sending surveys directly to online students without causing problems for the instructors. In spring 2019, Yev Lapik continued Jen's investigation into the online foreign language courses and also more broadly looked at best practices on online learning at other colleges in her [2019 Online Assessment Coordinator Report](#).
- **Cocurricular:** A highlight of the cocurricular work included praise from the HLC. Furthermore, throughout fall 2018, Carrie Nepstad began our committee's first work in cocurricular assessment. We were thankful to have the position approved by our administration, especially since it would help us prepare for our accreditation visit in October. Carrie met with various staff members in student affairs, advising, tutoring, and student clubs, and she then drafted ideas on how to encourage future work among all those groups. The HLC, after their visit, commented positively on our plan in their report. In spring 2019, Michael Heathfield continued this work by looking at best practices at other institutions. Since this branch of assessment was only recently getting national attention, there was not much research on what that assessment work would look like at a commuter campus. Michael again met with various staff members, and he specifically worked with Jennifer Vogel from advising to consider outcomes to assess. One of their initial conclusions was that there is often too much focus on student satisfaction, and this can make certain offices subject to negative reviews just because they are the places where students get bad news. For example, most students do not feel positively about financial aid even if given top-notch service. Usually the news is bad, involving less financial help than they would have liked. Measuring student satisfaction with the bearer of bad news may not be the most helpful indicator. It also doesn't reveal what students are learning through those student services interactions, which is what should be the focus of cocurricular assessment. See more details in our [Cocurricular 2019 Report](#).
- **Newsletters:** We continue to publish every semester the *Assessment Times*, perhaps the best outlet showing the work we do. See the [newsletter section of our webpage](#) for the [fall 2018 issue](#), [spring 2019 issue](#), and older issues back to 2004.
- **Presentations:** During our college's fall 2018 faculty development week, our unit liaisons presented their projects in breakout sessions. During spring 2019 registration week, some of our committee members gave more informal brief talks, including Amy Rosenquist connecting her experience as a foster parent to civic engagement and Carrie Nepstad talking about our recent data collection for civic engagement.
- **Collaboration Across the College:** In fall 2018 Carrie Nepstad met with Curriculum Committee chair Gabriela Cambiaso to discuss greater collaboration between our committees. Throughout the entire academic year, Yev Lapik often represented our committee at our college's shared governance meetings and leadership council meetings.

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- **HWC Administration:** Various Executive committee members, including Carrie, Jeffrey, and Yev, attended standing, bi-weekly meetings with our college's Office of Instruction to discuss assessment updates and to discuss other college activities that may benefit from the committee's insights. Some of the topics include the discussions about the HLC reaffirmation process, ongoing professional development needs at the college regarding the HWC assessment philosophy, and the administration of the student engagement survey.
  - **District:** Throughout fall 2018, Carrie Nepstad and Brandon Nichols (from District) discussed the advantages and disadvantages of district-wide general education outcomes.
  - **Brightspace:** In spring 2019, Carrie attended a district-wide meeting on the assessment capabilities of Brightspace. She was excited by the possibilities, but concerned about the learning curve and potential for pulling assessment away from being faculty-driven. After some discussion, we decided to keep using Google Docs for our surveys since Brightspace would require such a time investment to learn. Additionally, having just lost access to various surveys that had been supported by the previous learning management system (Blackboard), we did not want to set ourselves up for the same problem in the future should the learning management system be changed again.

## Accreditation

Throughout spring 2018, we had already started early preparations for our upcoming college-wide accreditation visit from the HLC, including a mock visit that went very well. In fall 2018, we worked on final preparations, including sharing various pieces of data for the self study and practicing mock interview questions. We also made plans to have each part of the visit attended by members of our committee in case the topic of assessment arose. We felt good about our college's situation vis a vis assessment since we had worked so hard to embed a culture of assessment at HWC and had grown so much since the last HLC visit ten years before. We had expanded from only working on general education to other branches including unit, online, and cocurricular.

In early October, the HLC review team visited our college with various meetings scheduled over several days. We made a ["Who We Are" video narrated by Carrie Nepstad](#) for them to watch ahead of time. Then on October 1st the four reviewers met with our committee as well as some of our college's administrators. For about an hour we answered their questions, with the discussion spanning the history of our committee.

A little over a month later, our college received the report from the HLC reviewers. Here are some of our favorite quotes:

- "HWC has put in a yeoman's effort to improve its assessment processes since its comprehensive review in 1998, which labeled its processes 'dysfunctional.' "
- "It was clear from the faculty engagement during the visit that the work of this committee is an incredible point of pride for the faculty involved in the committee as well as for the work of this institution as a whole."
- "Their enthusiasm and excitement for assessment of student learning and the work they are doing is commendable."

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- “Faculty truly own the assessment process at HWC.”

The reviewers also commented positively throughout their report on our expansion from general education to other branches, including unit, program, and online. They applauded our strong assessment culture in which participation is voluntary yet so many participate anyway. They liked our emphasis on not comparing faculty, thus keeping assessment separate from evaluation. They also complimented our collaboration with other committees, participation in faculty development, and our semesterly newsletter, all as methods for sharing out on the work we do. They specifically mentioned the unit assessment being done in 2D design and how faculty responded by spending more time on teaching art vocabulary. We were therefore glad Paul Wandless had shared about his work to them in such an engaging and memorable way.

Their suggestions for growth included expansion of cocurricular assessment, assessing general education within a shorter cycle, and looking more closely at how well our recommendations are implemented after being disseminated. These are suggestions we had already been thinking hard about, and we look forward to working on them in the coming years.


## Post-Accreditation

During the early weeks of spring 2019, we slowed down from the fast-paced accreditation preparation we had been doing all fall. We took time to reflect on our successful HLC visit and consider our committee’s vision for the future. We especially began discussing a major redesign of our general education practices.

Yet, a bit before midterm, we began hearing about the potential need for cuts to release time and stipends for all special assignment positions including our committee’s positions. In committee discussions in the following weeks, many of us shared disappointment that this would happen so soon after our successful help with accreditation. We feared our administration might now be less concerned with assessment since HLC would likely not visit again for at least 4 years. Yet to maintain the level of work that we had become accustomed to producing, we would continue to require commensurate administrative support.

In early March, we met with the college president Ignacio López. He asked us various questions about our work, and David Richardson presented on his unit assessment project regarding music juries. At the end of our meeting, President López shared that he wanted us to try to find external funding, such as through grants. We agreed to begin looking into it but were concerned since it would take so much time to find and apply for grants, and that meant we would be pulling time and energy away from the current assessment projects.

Later in March, President López led the college in running the Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI), a survey that looks at various aspects of student life and learning. In our committee discussions in the weeks leading up to the administering of this survey, we wondered how SSI related to the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). Our college had used CCSSE in the past in 2005, 2009, and 2014. Our committee had been involved in helping with various aspects of advertising and administering the CCSSE in each of those years. We wondered if there were benefits to the SSI compared to CCSSE. Most importantly, we were surprised when emails from our administration about the SSI never mentioned our past use of CCSSE. In fact, one email



about the SSI seemed to misleadingly claim that the college had not done any student satisfaction survey in over 10 years.

In early April 2019, our college's assistant director of research and planning, Sandy Vue, visited our committee to answer questions about the SSI. She was very helpful in explaining what our administration considered to be its advantages to us, especially its use of a cohort of other community colleges for comparison with HWC. We asked about comparing the SSI data to past CCSSE data, and Sandy said she only had access to the 2014 CCSSE data, not 2009 or 2005. She had not yet been asked to do any comparison but would look into it.

## Conclusion

Our last meeting of fall 2018 happened to be Carrie Nepstad's last meeting as chair after having served in that position since fall 2014. She shared at that time she had been reading over our webpage and noticing how much the committee had changed in its 15-year tenure. She noticed increases in our amount of writing, public speaking, and working with other groups on campus and district-wide. She also came upon old ideas she hoped we might bring back, such as our poster presentations from the mid-2000's or the student version of the *Assessment Times* from the early 2010's. And she finally shared some hopeful opportunities for growth, such as deeper cocurricular assessment and homemade videos for our website. We thanked her for helping us, and our college, make it through the accreditation visit. She agreed to serve in spring 2019 as vice-chair of general education in order to help the new chair transition into the role.

Jeffrey Swigart chaired the committee during spring 2019; the spring 2019 semester ended amid uncertainty regarding future administrative support for the committee's work. We entered the summer still not knowing about budget decisions regarding our release time and stipends, and in the middle of summer, we learned that, in addition to the search being conducted for the vacant vice-president position, we would have a new interim college president. All the meetings that had been conducted to introduce local administration to our committee's ethos and work would have to be repeated again the following academic year once new administrators were appointed. In a time of dramatic and rapid change with our upper administration, we worked to ensure the survival of institutional memory, respond to the needs of our college, and at the same time preserve our committee's mission and work.