

The best part of waking up, is assessment of student learning in your cup

Annual report of the HWC Assessment Committee for fall 2019 through spring 2020

Harold Washington College Assessment Committee

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



(Picture by gerald via Pixabay)

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Committee Membership

Executive Committee

- Chair: Erica McCormack, Humanities & Music
- Vice Chair of Unit Assessment: Jeffrey Swigart, Mathematics
- Vice Chair of General Education Assessment (Fall 2019): Carrie Nepstad, Social & Applied Science
- Vice Chair of General Education Assessment (Spring 2020): David Richardson, Humanities & Music
- Research Analyst: Fernando Miranda-Mendoza, Mathematics
- Research Analyst: Gustav Wiberg, Physical Science
- Secretary (Fall 2019): Shawntay King, Social & Applied Science
- Secretary (Spring 2020): Jack Whalen, Social & Applied Science

Coordinators

- Coordinator of Online Learning: Yev Lapik, Biology
- Coordinator of Cocurricular Assessment (Fall 2019): Michael Heathfield, Social & Applied Science
- Coordinator of Cocurricular Assessment (Spring 2020): Jennifer Vogel, Advising

Unit Assessment Liaisons

- Art and Architecture: Paul Wandless
- Biology (Fall 2019): Yev Lapik
- Biology (Spring 2020): Farah Movahedzadeh
- Business: Bridgette Mahan
- English, Speech, Theatre & Journalism: Kristin Bivens
- Humanities & Music: David Richardson
- Library: Todd Heldt
- Mathematics: Camelia Salajean
- Physical Science: Samar Ayesh
- Physical Science: Phillip Vargas
- Social and Applied Science (Fall 2019): Domenico Ferri
- Social and Applied Science (Spring 2020): Ingrid Riedle
- World Languages/ELL: Matthew Williams

Additional Participating Members

- Ukaisha Al-Amin, English, Speech, Theatre & Journalism
- Likwan Cheng, Physical Science
- Ignatius Gomes, Biology
- Terrance Hopson, Office of Instruction
- Jennifer Meresman, English, Speech, Theatre & Journalism
- Loretta Visomirskis, English, Speech, Theatre & Journalism
- Vincent Wiggins, Office of Instruction
- Allan Wilson, Physical Science

Introduction

The Harold Washington College Assessment Committee (HWCAC) had a memorable academic year in helping departments with assessment plans, reforming our general education outcomes, and navigating a budget crisis. Most impressively, the covid pandemic did not stop our high attendance in our weekly meetings as we moved to Zoom. In fact, for many of us it became an encouraging moment of the week in such dark times. What follows is an overview of our work with many links (in green underlined text) to more detailed reports.

Unit Assessment

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

- **Art and Architecture:** Paul Wandless assessed Art 145 3D Design for specific skills in manipulating platonic solids.
- **Biology (Fall 2019):** Yev Lapik worked to find what skills students need more help with in Biology 121, the intro bio course for biology majors.
- **Biology (Spring 2020):** Farah Movahedzadeh considered how retention could be improved by looking at biology students' motivation, interest, and self-reported goals.
- **Business:** Bridgette Mahan worked on her department's Program Quality Review report for the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP).
- **English, Speech, Theatre & Journalism:** Kristin Bivens assessed students in writing classes on their rhetorical knowledge, specifically their awareness of audience and purpose.
- **Humanities and Music:** David Richardson helped members of his department improve the rubrics for music performance juries for the associate in fine arts as well as the capstone projects for music technology and music business. He also considered retention strategies for Philosophy 105 Logic.
- **Library:** Todd Heldt assessed students' ability to choose effective keywords when searching for research sources.
- **Mathematics:** Camelia Salajejan assessed students' ability to solve polynomial equations and inequalities in Math 140 College Algebra.
- **Physical Science (Ayesh):** Samar Ayesh produced engaging classroom activities on four topics many students struggle with, including [limiting reactant and percent yield](#), [oxidation reduction](#), [solubility rules and net ionic equations](#), and [writing and balancing equations](#).
- **Physical Science (Vargas):** Phillip Vargas worked on updating the physical science departmental outcomes using the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) as a template.

- **Social and Applied Science (Fall 2019):** Domenico Ferri worked on embedding civic engagement into various courses in order to make it a departmental theme.
- **Social and Applied Science (Spring 2020):** Ingrid Riedle assessed students' level of political awareness and participation.
- **World Languages/English Language Learning:** Matthew Williams continued his long-range project of using the computer software Praat to help students in French language classes with pronunciation.

General Education Assessment

Our general education branch assesses learning outcomes that apply across the college's various disciplines that comprise the [General Education Core Curriculum](#). We usually do this by collecting general education data each fall and analyzing that data the following spring. During this academic year we caught up on finishing reports we were behind on, and we also spent time considering a revision to our gen ed student learning outcomes. Below is a summary of our work, with more detail in the [general education section of our webpage](#).

- **Quantitative Reasoning:** After collecting data in fall 2017, we analyzed the data and finished the report with recommendations. One recurring theme is the importance of interpreting statistics throughout all math classes and other subjects.
- **Civic Engagement:** After collecting data in fall 2018, we analyzed the data and finished the report with recommendations. One recurring theme is how civic engagement can be embedded into student clubs and other extracurricular opportunities.
- **Reform:** After using our current gen ed outcomes for over a decade, we started considering changes to them. David Richardson led a committee-wide discussion for many weeks, and we also collected survey data from faculty, staff, and students. As a result, we moved away from focusing on solely academic topics. We instead focused on broader ideas applying to all topics, and we tried to frame them as questions. For example, we took the verb "participate" and asked the question, "how do students encounter opportunities to participate?" We framed some questions in terms of improving student learning, such as by taking the verb "motivate" and asking, "what can the college do to motivate and keep you motivated to reach your educational goals?" At the end of spring 2020, we had a good yet unfinished list of potential outcomes. We agreed to continue this work in the next academic year.

Other Committee Highlights

- **Budget:** Because of lower enrollment and college-wide budget cuts during this academic year, we were part of many meetings requiring justification of our funding. For years we have used a mix of release time and stipends, yet the administration pressured us toward stipends because that costs the college slightly less. We were encouraged to seek outside funding, such as through grants. Kristin Bivens and Carrie Nepstad spent much time researching such grants, and they even wrote a proposal for the committee to write a grant-funded book about assessment. We

were luckily able to hold onto our college funding, thus not needing to get this grant. But we still did some extra in explaining and justifying our committee for the future since these conversations are likely to continue with frequent administrative turnover. Carrie wrote an open memo to our administration and colleagues entitled ["Why the College Should Continue to Invest in the Assessment Committee"](#). Kristin researched the Higher Learning Commission's published list of colleges under some sort of accreditation sanction and found that many of the reasons are due to weak assessment practices. We shared this on a new [accreditation section of our webpage](#). All the while we realized that our sister colleges have less assessment funding than us. But rather than having our funding cut we hoped the other colleges would have their funding increased.

- **Cocurricular:** The position of coordinator of cocurricular assessment is fairly new for us, now only being in its second academic year of existence. It has to do with how student learning is affected by all that happens outside of the classroom. [In fall 2019 Michael Heathfield wrote a report](#) with a broad future plan for assessing various cocurricular branches including advising, the Wellness Center, and the Disability Access Center. [In spring 2020 Jennifer Vogel wrote a report](#) about her work in assessing student training at our Transfer Center.
- **Covid:** Because of the pandemic that hit in March 2020, we were forced to move our meetings to Zoom.
- **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 2019 issue](#), [spring 2020 issue](#), and older issues back to 2004.
- **Online:** Yev Lapik, as coordinator of online learning assessment, considered how we can no longer easily categorize students as solely face-to-face or solely online, since so many students take a mix of face-to-face and online. [She wrote a report on these themes](#), especially about how we should no longer refer to students as "online students" but rather as "students taking online classes." The same is true for faculty members, as most teach a mix of face-to-face and online. So we should offer professional development for all faculty on all modalities.
- **Outreach:** Jack Whalen worked on adjunct outreach throughout the academic year, and Erica McCormack presented at the adjunct orientation in January 2020. Also, Erica attended the faculty chairs meeting in February of 2020 and discussed how unit liaisons can help departments with their program assessment.
- **Participation Stats:** Average weekly attendance of our meetings was 18 people for both fall 2019 and spring 2020. [More participation stats can be found here.](#)
- **Presentations:** These presentations happened during the 2019-2020 academic year.
 - [Carrie Nepstad & Jeffrey Swigart. \(October, 2019\). Assessment committee work as a form of faculty development. Presented at the Assessment Institute at IUPUI \(Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis\) in Indiana.](#)
 - [Erica McCormack. \(January, 2020\). Assessment at HWC. Presented at Harold Washington College adjunct orientation.](#)
- **Professional Development / Closing the Loop:** We gave a [survey to current and former committee members to ask how their involvement helped in their overall](#)

professional development. We got back a variety of answers including learning about data analysis, honing leadership skills, encouragement from positive energy, and of course, finer-tuned skills of assessing student learning within one's own classes. We realized that one of our committee's most significant contributions to our college is that we are a training ground for various skills. Specifically regarding leadership, by the end of spring 2020 we have had 46 different colleagues serve on leadership positions in the committee. Whatever other committees or positions they join will benefit from the skills learned on our committee. On a related note, our meetings would often involve talks to learn about various topics, such as Philip Vargas teaching us about qualitative coding. Finally, we consider this evidence of our "closing the loop" since it illustrates how our work is following our members to classrooms and contributing to improving student learning.

- **Program Assessment:** Many unit liaisons helped with program assessment for their departments. One specific example is how Paul Wandless considered potential program-level outcomes for the three programs in the art/architecture department, namely studio art, digital media design, and architecture.
- **Research Analysts:** Fernando Miranda-Mendoza Gustav Wiberg wrote a data protocol to guide committee members in handling any data they collect. It included tips on how to clean up excel spreadsheets ahead of time and how to ask very specific research questions to avoid grasping for results that are not there.

Conclusion

Administrators come and go. Budgets rise and fall. Covid rates spike and subside. Yet our committee continues to be a foundational part of our college, a solid rock of institutional history to give us grounding in the hardest times. We are all grateful to be a part of it.