

The Assessment Times

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Off to Waubonsee

In March, Amanda Loos, Tim Donahue and Todd Heldt are heading to the 12th Annual Assessment Fair at Waubonsee Community College in Sugar Grove, Illinois.

Their presentation will highlight our 2007 Humanities Assessment. Amanda will concentrate on the creation of this innovative assessment tool. Todd will explain the logistics of how the Assessment Committee managed the delivery of this college-wide assessment of the humanities general education outcome. Tim will close out the presentation with initial reactions to the assessment findings and comments on what we have already learned from this experience.

For Your Information

The 2007 Humanities Assessment:

- ❖ 33 faculty volunteered their sections.
- ❖ 42 sections were scheduled to take the assessment.
- ❖ 664 students completed the interactive survey and exam in computer room 401. This represented 10.23% of the student population at that time.

In the exam portion of the assessment, students were asked to choose between three different art forms for their critique:

- ❖ 46.7% chose to write about music – “*The Star Spangled Banner*”, performed by Jimi Hendrix in 1969.
- ❖ 29% chose to write about visual art – “*Aunt Jemima*”, by Murray dePillars, from 1968.
- ❖ 24.3% chose to write about poetry – “*right on: white america*”, written by Sonia Sanchez in 1970.

Data analysis is being finalized and will soon be available for faculty, staff and students.

Committee Members

Anita Kelley - Chair
Business/CIS

Mike Heathfield – Vice Chair
Applied Sciences

Chris Sabino - Secretary
Mathematics

Margarita Chavez
FL/ESL

Tim Donahue
English, Speech & Theater

Barrington Edwards
Associate Dean, Instruction

Domenico Ferri
Social Science

Todd Heldt
Library

Chao Lu
Mathematics

Liliana Marin
Physical Science

Willard Moody
English, Speech & Theater

Carrie Nepstad
Applied Sciences

Dana Perry
Physical Science

Dave Richardson
Humanities

Matthew Williams
ESL

Advisors and Guests

Tom Higgins
Faculty Council Rep.

Committee Work in Progress

Committee members are currently involved in a range of tasks related to our charge.

- ❖ **Math Assessment:** work is progressing on writing the math general education student learning outcome.
- ❖ **Science Assessment:** the learning outcome has been agreed upon, and we are currently searching for a relevant assessment tool for our specific urban community college context. We are also concerned to find a tool that gives us maximum usefulness for the data and analysis we generate.
- ❖ **Humanities Assessment:** work is progressing on data analysis and determining how best to use these findings as a catalyst for improved student learning on this outcome.
- ❖ **Meta Assessment Analysis:** committee members are reviewing the committee charge, progress to date, capacity, resources and future demands.

View Point

The Purposes of Assessment

From recent international literature¹ about assessment in higher education, it appears there are, at least, three different assessment purposes. Sometimes these complement one another, and sometimes there is a strong sense they compete with each other. Each of them has a history and a context. Each of them helps to understand the specific role of the Assessment Committee within the Harold Washington community.

Assessment of learning

This is historically the most dominant function of assessment and one that is still relevant to us today. When we attach a grade to an assignment, we certainly believe we are engaged in this purpose. The evidence reported in the key sources for this View Point suggests we may need to be challenged a little more on the traditional assumptions behind attaching grades to student work. Certainly, both research evidence and our own experiences tell us that students are frequently driven by this function: “Is this going to count towards my grade?”

When employers produce surveys about the ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge’ required in the workplace from graduates, they are talking about their needs and their assessment **of** learning from *some* outcomes of our work. When the federal government acts to establish standardized testing in higher education, they are talking about their need for assessment **of** learning – for regulatory and ‘quality’ control purposes.

Of course, employers and government may be talking about many other things too! The concern from accrediting agencies, many college staff and faculty is that removing judgments of worth from their specific contexts and cultures will begin to remove the ‘higher’ from education.

The Purposes of Assessment (continued)

In the assessment literature, this purpose is known as ‘warranting’, ‘certification’ or ‘summative’, and it speaks to wider social accountability for education. In a global economy, and with higher education becoming more accessible than it ever has been, the outcomes of our work become more important for all of us.

Assessment for learning

This is what we are all about! This is data collection, analysis, and suggestions for change that help us all understand how we are doing in relation to our planned, explicit learning outcomes. This can happen in a classroom, a course, a program, a department and a college. Whatever the level, the purpose is for us to understand better how our students are doing and how we can all act to improve this. This is why de-contextualized comparative data will not really help us with this purpose. This would also explain some key criticisms of the Spellings Commission 2006 Report.

The Assessment Committee focuses on our general education outcomes and assesses **for** learning at the college-wide level.

It is sometimes assumed that this is a relatively new invention and something dreamed up by those who manage institutions of learning. But this kind of assessment **for** learning has a long history in education, especially in the arts and social professions.

The impact of feedback, and now ‘feedforward’, on student learning is a whole area of learning research. There is consistent evidence to indicate that the type and timeliness of feedback can strongly influence student learning.

Assessment as learning

This may be a newer purpose for assessment and one that holds considerable promise, especially at the classroom level. Assessment **as** learning is when students engage in assessment activities that are learning activities in and of themselves. The research from psychology of learning, improving student learning and adult education all indicate that peer-assessment, self-assessment and shared responsibility for assessment embedded within the classroom culture of learning have a strong impact on improved student learning outcomes.

Learning how to learn is vital, but learning how to assess learning just might be even more important. Developing the metacognitive capacities of students is strongly supported in the improving student learning literature.

In more traditional higher education contexts, this is perhaps the most under-developed assessment purpose. When assessment is used **as** learning, students learn *for themselves* how to make judgments of worth about their own work and that of others.

Rubrics, portfolios, authentic assessment and explicit learning outcomes are vital for improving student learning. Getting students to formulate rubrics and criteria, self and peer-assess shares the responsibility with students as active judges. ‘Constructively aligned’ assessment, at its most powerful, supports students and assessment **as**, **for** and **of** learning.

This is a kind of ‘deep’ learning that travels with students when they have completed their brief time with us. And, as educators, we are all invested in the future success of our students.

Mike Heathfield

¹ Bloxham, S. & Boyd, P. (2007) *Developing Effective Assessment in Higher Education – A Practical Guide* Berkshire, England: Open University Press.
Boud, D & Falchikov, N. (2007) *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education – Learning for the longer term* London and New York: Routledge.
Author (2007) *Assessing Student Learning Peer Review* Vo. 9 No. 2 Spring Washington, DC: Association of American College and Universities.

The Pipeline

Criterion Three sponsored: 'The First Annual Meeting of the Minds Summit' is scheduled for Tuesday April 8. More details from Carrie Nepstad in Applied Sciences.

Assessment Related Conferences

113th Annual Meeting of The Higher Learning Commission
April 11-15, 2008 □ Hyatt Regency Chicago

Commitment vs. Compliance: Building Shared Responsibility and an Institutional Culture for Assessing and Improving Student Learning
May 28 – 30, 2008 Lisle, Illinois

Making a Difference in Student Learning: Assessment as Core Strategy
July 23 – 25, 2008 Lisle, Illinois

The 2008 Assessment Institute
October 26 – 28, 2008 Indianapolis, Indiana
Proposals due March 21, 2008
<http://planning.iupui.edu/conferences/national/nationalconf.html>

Jen and Carrie at HLC....

Jennifer Asimow and Carrie Nepstad will present "The Journey to Assessment at the Program Level: One Associate's Program Creates a Map for Common Ground" at the 113th Annual Meeting of the Higher Learning Commission in Chicago, April 14th 2008.

The Committee for the Art and Science of Teaching

Responding to Student Writing Workshop
Tuesday March 11th Room 1001/1002 from 2:30 to 4:30 pm.

The Committee is working to develop room 733 as a resource center for faculty. Ideas, suggestions and comments for the resource center and future workshops, contact Jenny Armendarez, room 711C, ext. 5898.

Assessment is the engine that drives the learning for all of us!