

HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

ONE OF THE CITY COLLEGES OF CHICAGO



THE ASSESSMENT TIMES

FOR STUDENTS

MEASURING STUDENT LEARNING:
SO WE CAN ALL IMPROVE OUTCOMES

SPRING, 2011

From the Chair

Everyone here at HWC is invested in student success, and I lead the Assessment Committee that meets on a weekly basis to look in detail about what our students are learning with regard to our general education curriculum. This probably makes us the busiest committee on campus! Each week, Assessment Committee members meet to discuss, plan, and implement the assessment of student learning outcomes.

If you have been a student here for more than a year, you might have been involved in some of our work. Your instructor might have asked you to take part in a survey on a number of curriculum areas. Most recently, we had almost 1,000 students complete an assessment tool exploring knowledge and attitudes about the social sciences. Some of you may even remember taking a Quantitative Reasoning assessment and the Nanos and iPods that were awarded to lucky raffle winners – we tried hard to give some incentive to doing some extra math work!

We use the information we gather to look at our students in aggregate, so that we can make recommendations about how to improve student learning in the general education disciplines. Assessment is an important process for our accreditation and for faculty to demonstrate a detailed investment in understanding how and what our students learn, and how they can demonstrate this.

The Assessment Committee is currently engaged in four different major tasks:

Running a small pilot to assess ‘Effective Writing’ across the curriculum and planning a full assessment of this in the fall of 2011.

Analyzing all the data gathered from the Social Science Assessment of fall 2010 and deciding what we will recommend to improve our students’ capabilities in the social sciences.

Using our data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, used in 2005 and 2009, to see what has changed at HWC with regard to student engagement and how we can still improve on this. Student engagement sets the vital context in which learning takes place, so we are invested in looking at the details of engagement with college.

Finalizing our report on the findings about our students and Quantitative Reasoning. This report, called “Comfort, Complexity and Competence,” should be available soon on our website.

The Assessment Committee Web Site

Did you know that you can see many aspects of the Assessment Program at HWC via our web site? It can be found at: <http://sites.google.com/site/hwcassessment/>

HISTORY WINS! Not Really.

Social Science Assessment-2010

Last spring, HWC conducted an institution-wide assessment that looked at the social sciences throughout the college. You may remember participating in it. It asked you to read nine separate hypothetical conversations between two social scientists and then identify which social science discipline you believed the social scientists belonged to. Early analysis indicates that students were able to identify history the most and anthropology the least.

There is still a lot of work to do in analyzing this data. Look for more news about it in the fall.

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Community College Survey of Student Engagement

In 2005, HWC students participated in a national survey looking at student engagement at community colleges. Student engagement includes all of the ways in which students feel connected to their college experience. In fall 2009, we participated again in the same survey and are now able to compare those first results with the most recent.

The results show that HWC students are more satisfied now than they were in 2005 in each of the 5 benchmark areas: Active/Collaborative Learning, Student Effort, Academic Challenge, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners. These benchmarks are directly related to student success. In addition, we now outscore the averages for the comparison groups in all five areas. This is an improvement from 2005, when we outscored the comparison groups in 4 of the 5 areas but lagged behind in the area of Support for Learners.

When we received this information 6 years ago, the college put forth every effort to work on improving student support and the perceptions of student support throughout the institution. We can see from the most recent results that we are doing better, but more work needs to be done.

You May Be Interested to Know.... Quantitative Reasoning

During the fall 2009 semester, students participated in a college-wide Quantitative Reasoning Assessment (QRA). This assessment was written in two parts, the first part including informational on demographics, math comfort level, and appreciation of math complexity, and the second part included questions measuring quantitative reasoning competence on key skills. 1,132 students participated in this assessment.

Students performed best on questions about graphs and performed weakest on questions about percents. One interpretation of this information is that HWC students are better able to work with visual data, which would suggest that using visual strategies as a teaching tool is beneficial to students. The data also indicated that an increased emphasis should be placed on using percents in all classes, even non-math classes.

In addition, we found that there was a strong correlation between how students felt about math (comfort level) and their competence in math. This stands to reason: students who like math and feel comfortable with it, perform better than those who are less comfortable with it.

A surprising result came from examining the data in terms of cohorts of students. Students were divided into three cohorts:

Cohort 1 – Math 3001-3002, and Math 98-99

Cohort 2 – Math 118, 121, 122, 125, 140

Cohort 3 – Math 141, 133, 146, 204, 207, 208, 209, 210, 212

Students in Cohort 2 had the highest average scores. You might think that students in Cohort 3 would score the highest, but they didn't. One possible reason for this is that students in Cohort 2 are currently immersed in the kind of mathematical concepts that were being assessed in the QAR.

There is so much to discover about how HWC students feel and learn about math. We will continue to examine these data and report our findings to you and to the HWC faculty.

I'll never be able to
understand math!



The Assessment Committee Charge

The HWC Assessment Committee is dedicated to the improvement of student learning through the meaningful utilization of assessment data in an effort to support the HWC community toward the evolution of college curriculum. As outlined in this charge, the HWC Assessment Committee is committed to defining assessment at Harold Washington College, as well as establishing and ensuring that appropriate assessment procedures and practices are followed in collecting, reviewing, analyzing, and disseminating information/data on assessment. Finally, the HWC Assessment Committee is responsible for providing a forum for dialogue regarding assessment issues to support a college culture, which includes the assessment process.

The Assessment Committee is made up of faculty, administrators, and professional staff. We are always looking for more interested members, including students. If you have any questions about becoming a member of the committee or about anything else concerning assessment at HWC, please contact Michael Heathfield, Chair @ mheathfield@ccc.edu (office 712) or Jennifer Asimow, Vice-Chair @ jasimow@ccc.edu.