

HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

THE ASSESSMENT TIMES

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FROM THE CHAIR

Changing Assessment...

I recently attended the Higher Learning Commission conference in Chicago, and other than the huge scale of the conference, a number of things resonated with me about how our future assessment strategies may change in light of the political, academic, and accreditation futures highlighted in many of the conference presentations.

As we all know by now, in our new post-modern reality, trust is a central issue, and everything has to be proven in our world of education and public service. The assessment of student learning is obviously central to this. While we have always framed assessment as a particular iterative process, similar to Kolb's experiential learning cycle, my sense is that the emphasis in this cycle has shifted.

Our assessments, which focused on our general education learning outcomes, have helped us understand much more about what our students learn, how they best learn, and some of the key influences on their learning outcomes. HWC's Assessment Committee has a solid decade of this kind of research. We have always used this data to recommend what a range of HWC stakeholders can do to improve these outcomes.

I know all Assessment Committee members remain acutely aware that the most difficult aspect of this process involves what we have frequently called "Closing the Loop." Online, in print, on classroom posters, and in person, we have disseminated and discussed the findings of our assessments. Yet we have no supervisory or managerial responsibility for implementing any changes that this assessment knowledge feeds. This is not within our charge, and it would be impossible and unhelpful to make it so. But the context of assessment has changed, and a renewed focus on change related to student success is not just emanating from District Office.

If we are a knowledgeable institution, what actions do we take on our important assessment data? While we might be uncomfortable with the notion of "data-driven management,"

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it seems reasonable to be asked what changes have occurred through the use of our assessment findings. This shift is registered in the new accreditation criteria, in which there is a much higher expectation that “learning institutions” demonstrate they have invested resources on change and improvement (this means from the budget to solid evidence of action).

There will also be a much higher emphasis on the quality and consistency of general education courses across all formats – this means learning “whenever and wherever.” Regardless of the format in which a course is delivered, we will need strong evidence that our programs provide what is claimed for them.

Two of the great strengths we have here at Harold Washington are our long-standing assessment culture and a supportive management team invested in sustaining and expanding this culture. In some of the changing requirements outlined above, we have a good head start. Expanded support for assessment activities was specifically included in next year’s budget--this now awaits decisions at District. Let’s hope that budget-conscious minds at District have also soaked up the “Assess → Plan → Improve” mantra.

Assessment change is coming. Are we ahead of this? Or is it something that could be imposed on us externally?

Human Diversity

Many of you may remember that the Assessment Committee spent the spring and fall of 2005 defining Human Diversity on the Harold Washington Campus and subsequently developing an assessment that examined student learning and dispositions toward it. The survey that was developed included a section about demographics (defining who was participating in the survey), a section about attitudes and dispositions, and a section about experiences learning about and engaging with diversity.

Now that seven years have passed, the Assessment Committee is going to take another look at Human Diversity next fall. This is very exciting for three reasons: 1. it marks our institution’s commitment to assessment by starting a second revolution of assessing our general education learning goals, 2. we have baseline data from 2005 that can be used as a comparison, and 3. since 2005, our college has added a Human Diversity requirement on campus.

In addition, the committee has added a few changes to the definition. As Michael said, “The world has changed over the past 7 years, and our definition should, as well.” Can you find the changes and additions?

“To understand and respect human diversity in regard to the full range of cognitive, behavioral, and affective practices and interactions through which human beings share life in common spaces.

Diversity is defined by such things as: age, citizenship, education, ethnicity, gender, health, language, marital status, national origin, political beliefs, physical attributes and disabilities, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, veteran status, and other differences in cultural expression and tradition.”

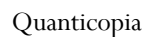
Look for information about the Human Diversity Survey at the beginning of the fall term 2012.

Scoring across the Disciplines: Scoring Essays and Reports for the Effective Writing Assessment

In the Fall 2011 semester, the Assessment Committee administered the Effective Writing Assessment to 600 students in the academic departments. Eight teachers from the departments of Applied Science, English, ESL, and Humanities read the essays and reports that students wrote. Each writing sample had to be read twice, so the workload was 1200 readings. Therefore, each reader read approximately 150 writings for the assessment. As a reader for the assessment, I experienced the full range of a reader’s attitudes towards a mass of written work, and I learned a lot about writing and scoring across the disciplines/departments at Harold Washington College.

Some writings were a joy to read: the writers had a unique voice, organized and developed their ideas skillfully, and wrote with mechanical competence (e.g., proper grammar, spelling, punctuation). On the other hand, some writings were disheartening to read because the authors failed to organize and develop their ideas and were mechanically incompetent. Then there was the mass of essays and reports that were somewhere between the two extremes.

Each writing was scored in six areas: focus, organization, voice, coherent development and elaboration, writing conventions, and style and diction. One thing that I learned from the assessment was that scoring the writings was difficult, because there was a great variety of assignments from different courses and departments. In other words, consistency in scoring was hard to apply across the board. Nevertheless, I strove to maintain consistency. For example, I required that each writing sample have an introduction, a development, and a conclusion. On the three-point rubric used for the assessment (3=very competent, 2=competent, 1=below competent, and 0=unsatisfactory), I gave three points for organization if a writing had a decent beginning, middle, and end. Thus, I scored the writing as “very competent.” However, if a writing sample had a good introduction and development but didn’t have a conclusion, I took off one point, scoring the



In 2003 the committee assessed our students' critical thinking using the CCTST (California Critical Thinking Skills Test) and then reassessed with it again in 2006. Information literacy was assessed in 2004 using the SAILS (Standardized Assessment of Information Literacy Skills). In 2005 committee members developed their first homemade assessment on

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Assessment Committee

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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 towards 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.

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

We are always looking for new faculty, students and staff to join in our exciting work. We meet every Wednesday from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. in room 1032. All are welcome to join us. The Committee Charge states that there can only be two voting members from each department, but we are happy to involve as many people in our work as possible. If you want to discuss what this might involve or ask further questions, please contact Mike Heathfield (see contact info at left).

diversity. The committee went a step further in 2007 by developing its own assessment on humanities, this time including open-ended essay responses. Grading these essays required a fleet of in-house graders, after which the data was analyzed in-house and the committee wrote its first extensive final report on an assessment, full of recommendations to improve student learning. In 2008, the committee assessed the natural sciences using the EBAPS (Epistemological Beliefs Assessment for Physical Science), and then once again wrote an extensive final report in-house.

Over the past three years, the committee has developed three more of its own assessments on three different topics: quantitative reasoning in 2009, social sciences in 2010, and effective writing in 2011. Each of these included open-ended student responses that required grading by in-house

graders. All data analysis and report writing was also completed in-house. Presently, the committee is making plans to assess diversity again during fall 2012 and then reassess the other general education outcomes over the following years. A look at this ten-year history of our committee shows the increasing complexity of our work in assessing our students' abilities, and we hope to continue to improve our work for even more helpful results and recommendations to improve student learning. To see some of our reports and other work, visit our new webpage at the following address: < <http://ccc.edu/hwcassessment> >.



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