

HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

THE ASSESSMENT TIMES

FALL, 2012

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FROM THE CHAIR

The Four C's at HWC

As the daylight grows shorter and our workloads grow ever bigger, I thought it was time for some autumnal reflection on why I love our Assessment Committee. Needless to say, we are wildly busy managing a whole number of things relevant to our charge:

- Getting everything ready for our Human Diversity Assessment during Assessment Week;
- Putting the final graphic touches to our Student Learning in the Social Sciences report;
- Finalizing the writing and analysis of our Effective Writing at Harold Washington College report;
- Working with Humanities, Applied Sciences and Art faculty on our new discipline assessment pilot;
- Re-writing our charge and job descriptions to account for our newer and expanded roles;
- Planning a new 7-year assessment timetable to take us successfully through our next accreditation; and,
- Contributing to the new District-wide Assessment Chairs meetings.

These tasks require very liberal doses of what I think of as the four C's at HWC. We are fortunate to have them in abundance and have many people who understand how to grow and sustain them.

Collegiality is central to how we work. Every week, sixteen or more faculty come together to work, share, listen and get things done. Sometimes we disagree, we often have some fairly heated debates, but we always move our agenda forward with great respect for each

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Mike Heathfield - Chair
Applied Sciences

Jen Asimow - Co Chair
Applied Sciences

Jeffrey Swigart - Secretary
Mathematics

Samar Ayesh
Physical Sciences

Andrew Cutcher
World Languages

LaRhue Finney
English

John Kieraldo
Library

Lynnel Kiely
Social Science

Chao Lu
Mathematics

Erica McCormack
Humanities

Charles McSweeney
Advising

Willard Moody
English, Speech & Theater

Carrie Nepstad
Applied Sciences

Dave Richardson
Humanities

Ray Tse
Physical Sciences

Phillip Vargas
Physical Sciences

Loretta Visomirskis
English

Paul Wandless
Art and Architecture

Matthew Williams
ELL/WL



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other. It really is a great pleasure to share the time and work with these colleagues.

We have assessment **Capacity** that is broad and deep. Every member of the Assessment Committee brings a range of talents and experiences to the table and we try to capitalize on these as often as possible. Seasoned faculty work alongside new – and some of us are very seasoned! Each year a different committee member steps up to head that year's assessment and all members have roles through very active subcommittees. For this year's Human Diversity Assessment, headed by Jeff Swigart of the Math Department, we have 50 faculty volunteers participating, showing our capacity extends well beyond the boundaries of active committee members.

Capability. We understand we are the only assessment committee in the CCC system that has specified student learning outcomes for each of the ICCB general education areas and has conducted a distinct assessment on each. We also know we have an exceptionally strong institutional budget for assessment and for this we thank an administration who know how important it is to support faculty in their assessment work. My email inbox of late, tells me that some of our CCC colleagues do not feel surrounded by such capability.

The last C is **Control**. Perhaps the most challenging aspect of our work, but something that is essential in any organization. We are a faculty-led and institutionally supported committee that plays an important role in demonstrating our commitment to consistent improvements in student learning. We control our workload, our outputs and our outcomes; we are clearly in control of our work. But this is a partnership between administrators and faculty. We are not burdened with an administration that seeks to exert control over us. The challenge of control is one that for some colleges, and for some at District, is more problematic. I am a great advocate of the work of Michael Fullan, an educational reform specialist who has worked globally on public education systems. In "Professional Capital" he notes:

"You can't mandate evidence-based programs in lockstep fashion. Professional expertise is not just about having the evidence or

being aware of it. It's also about knowing how to judge the evidence and knowing what to do with it."

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012:54)

In our assessment committee work, I believe we demonstrate strong collegiality, capacity, capability and control. It is truly a pleasure to be part of such a great group of colleagues.

Mike Heathfield

Effective Writing Assessment at HWC

During the 2011-2012 academic year, the Assessment Committee was busy piloting and conducting an assessment of our General Education Goal of Effective Writing. This is one small part of the larger goal of Written and Oral Communication. Since we knew that assessing the entire goal would be virtually impossible, we broke it down into smaller assessable parts. We hope to visit Oral Communication in the near future. As a reminder, our SLOs for Effective Writing are:

The student will be able to:

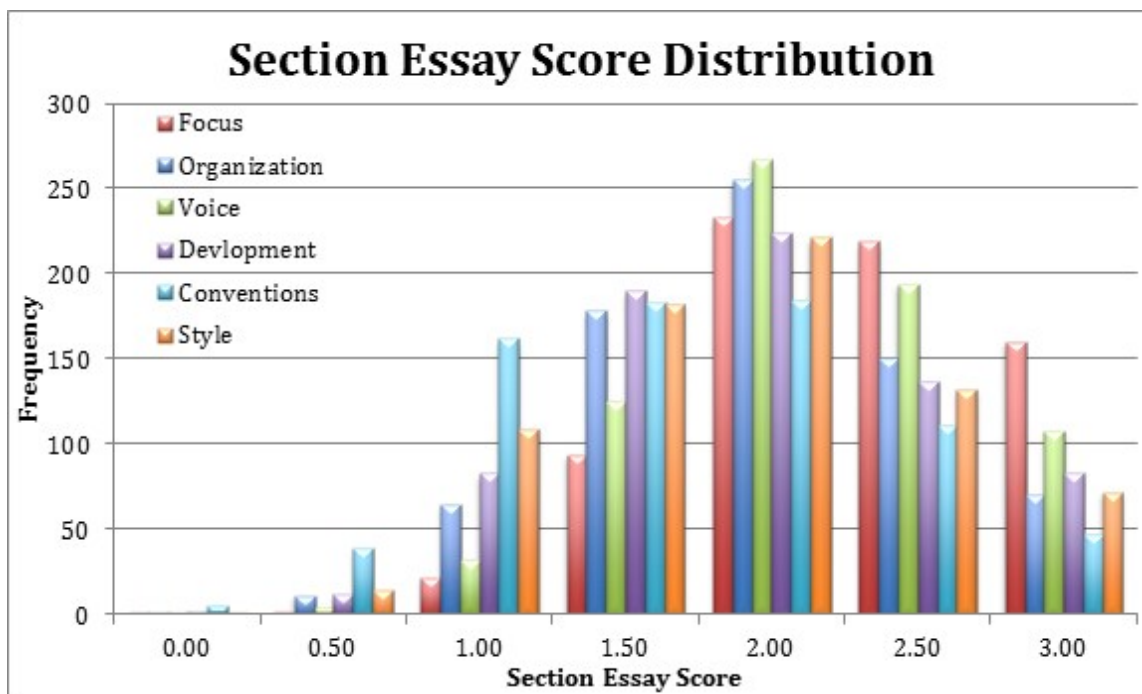
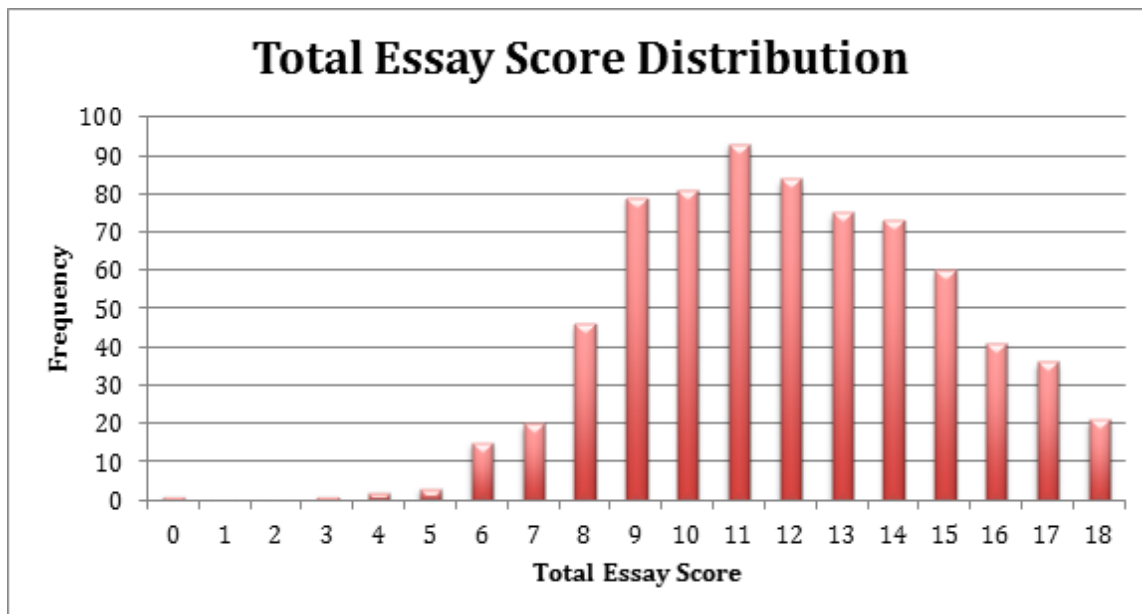
1. Compose texts across multiple disciplines and for various audiences, occasions and purposes.
2. Construct texts for communication, information, and expression which adhere to the rules of Standard Written English;
3. Compose texts that are focused, well-organized, and well-developed.

Last spring, we collected 714 writing samples from departments throughout the college. We were interested in collecting actual writing samples that were produced as a natural and typical part of classroom assignments. These ranged from essays to exam answers to journal submissions. Each of the 714 student participants also completed a survey that validated our sample through demographic questions. In addition, the survey probed students' affect and dispositions toward writing, the process, and their experiences.

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Using a grading rubric developed by the Assessment Committee, the writing samples were read by 2 graders. About 100 samples required a 3rd reader. These were scored in the following areas: Focus, Organization, Voice, Development, Cohesion and Style. Each of these categories had a possible rating 3-Very Competent, 2-Competent, 1-Below Competent and 0-Unsatisfactory. HWC students had the most trouble with Conventions, with a mean score of 1.67. They scored the highest in Focus with a mean score of 2.23. The median total score was an 11.



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The committee is getting very close to completing the report that will provide all of the data and interpretations of that data to the HWC community. In the meantime, here are some early tidbits from the assessment.

1. Students performed significantly better on the assessment if they reported that they had been asked to write more in the Social Sciences, Humanities, and English. More writing means better writing.
2. There was no correlation between students' self reported confidence in each of the areas of the rubric and their performance in those areas. In other words, students aren't aware (or can't articulate their awareness) of their areas of strength and challenges in writing.
3. There was no significant difference between the way English faculty and non-English faculty scored the writing samples.

The final report should be available before the end of the semester. It promises to be very informative.

Social Science Findings go to New Mexico

On October 15, 2012, Lynnel Kiely, HWC Assessment Committee Member (currently serving on the Reinvention team) presented an education paper entitled "Assessing Social Science Competency in Higher Education" at the National Social Science Association Conference held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Her presentation focused on the mission and history of the HWC Assessment Committee, the goals of the custom-designed social science assessment tool, the methodological approach used, the data findings, analysis and recommendations based on what was learned through the process. Her session was well attended with professionals genuinely interested in the overall approach to assessing a variety of disciplines within one tool. Professor Kiely reports that many of the attendees inquired about the automated structure of the assessment process and were curious to discover how HWC capitalizes on the results of its assessment endeavors. As a long-time serving committee member, Professor Kiely had no problem in citing several examples of the changes in HWC procedures, processes and programs resulting from HWC assessments. In her presentation, Lynnel clearly defined the steps involved in establishing student learning outcomes and the importance in recognizing that not all outcomes need to be measured within a single assessment tool. She addressed the issue of the complexities involved such as the technical implications and the grading rubrics required. The assessment tool created by the HWC Assessment Committee assessed two of the four learning outcomes aimed at the social science

general education learning outcome and included sections that measured the student's comfort level with the social sciences in comparison to other academic disciplines. Although the final report of the assessment process was not completed at the time of the presentation, Professor Kiely was able to share some preliminary findings regarding the learning of social science (SS) at HWC:

- Students have great latitude in selecting SS courses
- SS survey courses dominate in enrollment
- Students value their SS learning and see it has utility in understanding the world
- Students are less certain of its utility to future careers or coursework.
- Students understand that SS learning is complex and not dependent on factual recall of retained knowledge
- Students tend to compartmentalize their SS learning and are weak in identifying strong interdisciplinary connections
- Students who complete more SS classes demonstrate a greater knowledge base and greater comfort level for the SSs

These findings, among many others soon to be revealed in the final report, will stimulate evidence-based changes at the classroom, discipline, department and institutional level which will ultimately impact positive improvement in student learning with regard to the social sciences.

Human Diversity Assessment Across Many Campuses

In November of 2012, a group of colleges in the CCC will be administering a diversity assessment at each of their respective campuses. These colleges include Harold Washington College, Truman College Kennedy-King College, Malcolm X College, and Olive-Harvey College. The Center for Distance Learning is also participating. This diversity assessment was originally written and administered by the HWC Assessment Committee in 2005. Now, each of the colleges in this group are tailoring the assessment to their own needs and then administering it. Throughout the process, we are all having open discussions about what is working best and what needs improvement, in order to help each other improve assessment at our campuses. This marks a new era in colleges at the CCC working together with assessment.

Currently, we have 50 faculty members who have volunteered sections of their courses to participate in the survey. This could yield well over 1500 students participating in the survey. We are looking forward to sharing the current data from this survey as well as comparative data from the 2005 survey.

Department/Program Assessment Pilot Begins

Department and Program Assessment projects are underway at Harold Washington College in three departments—Applied Science, Art, and Humanities—with pilot assessments scheduled for this fall. Carrie Nepstad, Paul Wandless, and Erica McCormack are coordinating their department's projects from start to finish, making use of release time to do it, in close partnership with their department's faculty.

Applied Science is working on a project to assess student writing across all four of their disciplines that began with a survey of faculty about student writing and continues with a survey of students on topics related to assignments, process, feedback and more.

The Art department is working on developing outcomes and assessments for their A.F.A. in Studio Art, focusing first on some basic skills as found in Art 131: General Drawing and Art 144: Two-Dimensional Design.

Humanities, meanwhile, is developing outcomes and assessment tools for multiple aspects of the music program, focusing initially on students ability to notate and read music.

The project is the latest and most ambitious version of a long-standing college goal—having learning outcomes and ongoing assessment for all the levels of college—and is a goal with new urgency thanks to the recent changes in the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) of the North Central Association (NCA) Accreditation Criteria.

As of last February, the HLC/NCA has adopted evolved criteria that have moved outcomes and assessment from a something they look for to something they assume the colleges have and are making use of at the institutional, programmatic, and classroom levels.

“[A] process of assessment is essential to continuous improvement and therefore a commitment to assessment should be deeply embedded in an institution's activities. Assessment applies not only to student learning and educational outcomes but to an institution's approach to improvement of institutional effectiveness. For stu-

dent learning, a commitment to assessment would mean assessment at the program level that proceeds from clear goals, involves faculty at all points in the process, and analyzes the assessment results; it would also mean that the institution improves its programs or ancillary services or other operations on the basis of those analyses. Institutions committed to improvement review their programs regularly and seek external judgment advice, or benchmarks in their assessments...”

--Revised Criteria for Accreditation, HLC

In response, last Spring, the Assessment Committee proposed a pilot plan, in partnership with the Dean of Instruction, to “begin a faculty-driven systemic approach to Departmental Assessment using the auspices and expertise of the Assessment Committee as guides.”

Assessment at the Departmental level has always been somewhat of a challenge across campus. Departments have a variety of systems in place and have had very different contours of success in implementing assessment at this level. In 2006 through 2008, ad-hoc working groups developed drafts of plans and outcomes, but most were not carried out owing to a lack of dedicated resources.

Last spring, a whole new budget line was developed to account for this pilot implementation in the fiscal year of 2012/2013. The pilot has begun with a small selection of departments committing to take part in this new assessment activity, with an anticipated expansion in following years to incorporate all of the programs and departments.

The best outcome of this project would be if it were to spark lots of conversation about student learning among colleagues and create new ways of looking at student learning while expanding the scope and awareness of our college-wide assessment activities. It'll be useful, too, when accreditation time—a mere presidential term away—rolls around again.

HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

Assessment Committee

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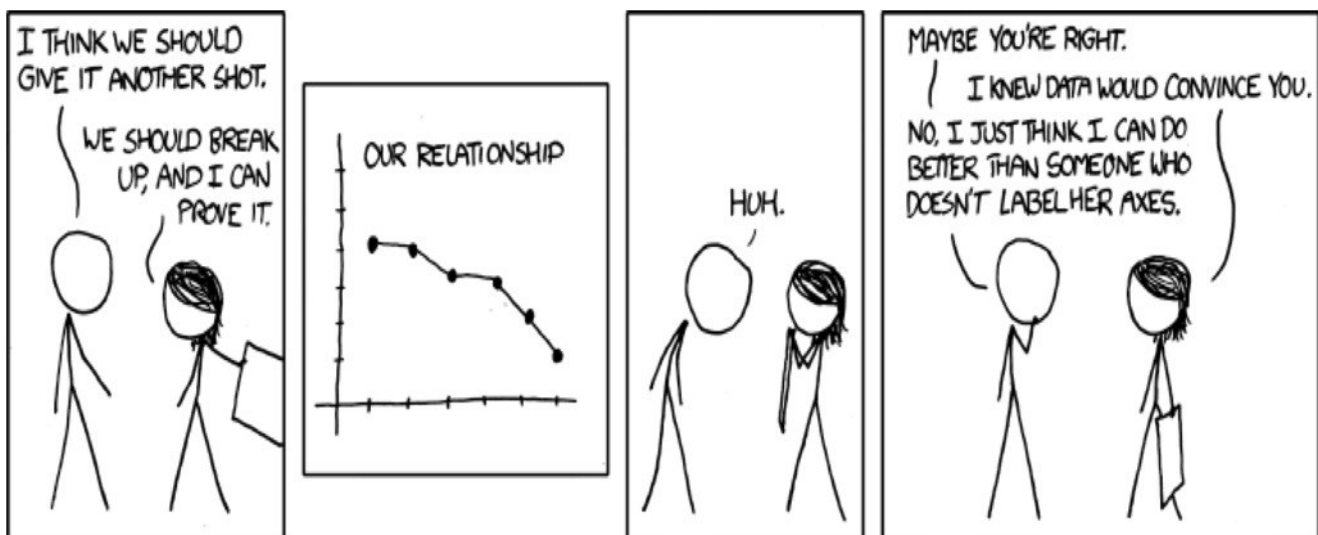
ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE CHARGE

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).

Data Trouble!



Source: <http://www.xkcd.com/>



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