HAROLD WASHINGTON COLLEGE

THE ASSESSMENT TIMES

NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

FALL, 2016

MEMBERS:

FROM THE CHAIR

Shocking News from the Chair

For the first time in HWC's history, every department now has an Assessment Liaison and I am very proud of this fact. This is a goal the entire committee has been slowly working toward over the past several years, and something I personally have been advocating for since the Don Laackman (former HWC President) era! It's my firm belief that the most meaningful assessment of student learning is done at the departmental level. Within departments is where we as content experts constantly grapple with the question, "are our students learning what we have planned for them to learn"? It's important to understand that the Liaisons do not "do" assessment "for" the Assessment Committee. Rather, the Liaisons work within their departments to either strengthen assessment practices already in place or build a process from the ground up. The committee does not determine what Assessment Liaisons should be assessing or how it should be assessed. The committee provides support to the Liaisons so they can work with colleagues within the department to create assessment processes that are meaningful to faculty. The liaison program is one of the unique characteristics of the culture of assessment at HWC.

In terms of general education, data collected on the Natural Sciences assessment has been analyzed and was presented in committee, and again more formally at the Assessment Institute conference at IUPUI in Indianapolis. The committee has been reflecting on the findings and will report recommendations to the HWC community. This semester, the Humanities assessment is in progress. Data are being collected and an interdisciplinary faculty team of raters will get together for a norming session before the rating process begins. This is necessary because the Humanities assessment involves a writing component that will be read by two raters with a third reading as needed. The plan is to analyze Humanities data during the spring semester.

This semester launched a new initiative in HWC assessment focusing on the assessment of student learning in an online environment. Data are being collected this semester to determine how students feel about the learning process in an online setting compared to face-to-face. Another new aspect of

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IN THIS ISSUE:

HWC assessment that was launched this semester is an emphasis on Program level assessment. This is a follow-up to work that has been done within the departments offering programs which result in a certificate or degree. This has been an extremely busy time as we have expanded work in every aspect of our assessment practices and as we are, in some cases, breaking new ground on innovative areas of assessment never done before at HWC.

Looking ahead, the committee plans to work closely with the Criterion Chairs to prepare for our upcoming Higher Learning Commission (HLC) visit. As was the case ten years ago, assessment of student learning is an important component of HLC accreditation and the committee is well-prepared to provide evidence of the work we do at HWC. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me cnepstad@ccc.edu or visit our website.

Carrie Nepstad, Chair

The Government Doesn't Want you to Know about this Great Opportunity: Learning Online

Do you have questions about online learning? Do you wonder if the online learning experience is equal to that of a traditional face-to-face classroom? Are you interested in knowing why students choose to take classes online and how they perceive their learning in this format? Do you want to know what works well in an online course and what doesn't?

We are trying to get to the bottom of these answers as well. This year we have begun the process of looking at our online coursework in terms of "learning" by creating and administering a survey about student perceptions of learning in the online environment. This is an indirect assessment measure, as it doesn't provide actual data about learning gains

Carrie Nepstad, Sarah Kakumanu, and Philip Vargas presented findings of the Natural Science assessment at the IUPUI Assessment Institute in October

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but rather provides information to the college regarding students' personal feelings and opinions about their learning online.

The administrators of online learning already do a wonderful job collecting analytic information about their courses. Analytics look specifically at student's usage; frequency and length of time online, and the Learning Management System (LMS) elements that are available in the Blackboard course. Analytics are often used by faculty to monitor how much time a student spends in the course, how often they view assignments, and how often they post information in the Discussion Board. Analytics focus on the use of the LMS and not the student learning of the course content.

Assessment of student learning seeks to answer questions about the teaching and learning process so it can be improved. The survey includes questions designed to investigate the following: do students in online classes feel that group projects support their learning? Do discussion boards deepen understandings? Are the textbooks and supporting materials scaffolding understandings the way they are meant to? Once we have answers to these questions, we can improve course design so it addresses the specific learning needs of our students.

Jen Asimow and Vince Wiggins

You'd be Surprised to Know What this Committee Stands for: How to Do Assessment

As a new member to the Assessment Committee last Spring semester, my understanding of "Assessment" was limited to the questions asked and the resulting scores. What I wish I had known is the important role assessment plays in creating an evolving classroom. Assessment provides timely snapshots of the teaching/learning process and anticipates wide-scale misconceptions in student learning before graded assignments, quizzes, or exams.

With the goal of "informing instruction", assessments are generally simple, non-graded, anonymous, and held in-class. The entire class' level of understanding is measured, not focusing on individual students. The quantity of topics or questions covered or the number of assessments given over the semester is secondary to the instructor's ability to review the results and make any necessary changes to the instruction. An effective assessment should be related to your teaching style and be easily applied to your classroom structure. If you prefer, it may be helpful to provide students with the purpose of the assessment as feedback on understanding, the "most confusing" point in a lesson, an better recognizing the "why vs. how".

This goal is mirrored in the unit level and general education assessments. The objectives of the assessment are first identified. On a department level this can be done by using SLO's for a sequence of classes. Next, questions are selected or formed to best measure these objectives. A sample is selected across the department or college and analyzed to provide a picture of this learning process. Finally, the lessons learned are applied back into the classroom. This continuous cycle invites each of us to become students of the learning process, to reinforce teaching methods that are valuable for student learning and reexamine those that can be improved.

Sarah Kakumanu

Jeffrey Swigart Had a Vision and you Won't Believe What Happened Next: Humanities Assessment 2016

During this fall 2016 semester the Assessment Committee is collecting data on the general education outcome of humanities. The last time we did this was in 2007 with a survey in which students answered questions about their attitudes towards the humanities and also wrote an analysis essay on a cultural artifact from the late 1960's or early 1970's. The artifact choices included a poem by Sonia Sanchez, a drawing by Murray dePillars, and a musical piece by Jimi Hendrix. One result of the attitudes section of the survey was that "97% of students indicated that studying the arts gave them new ways to think about their lives" (HWC Humanities Assessment Report, 2007). One discovery from analyzing the essays was that "students rarely utilize the technical vocabulary of the disciplines in their engagements with cultural artifacts" (HWC Humanities Assessment Report, 2007).

This semester, we're doing a similar survey, again with an attitudes section and an essay section. The cultural artifacts are from the 1880's and 1890's, including a musical piece by Scott Joplin, a philosophical text by John Dewey, a painting by Mary Fairchild MacMonnies, and a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar. We will be collecting data from the classes of our loyal faculty members who are willing to volunteer, and then we'll be analyzing the essays and data over the coming months. We look forward to having results and recommendations to share with everyone.

Jeff Swigart

The 13 Most Fake Scientific Discoveries in History: Natural Sciences Assessment

The Harold Washington College Assessment Committee administered an assessment in the natural sciences in November 2015. This assessment was a newly developed tool to measure student learning, attitudes about the sciences, and how they correlate with academic history. This tool was deployed entirely electronically and cross-referenced with the

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City Colleges of Chicago web-based analytics and reporting platform, Openbook.

The results of this assessment showed taking classes in the natural sciences both improved their performances on the assessment tool (~0.25 Spearman correlation coefficient) and positivity affected their attitudes about the natural sciences (~17% more favorable views). It also illustrated the complexity of attempting to quantify these gains. While these correlations are by definition "weak" the assessment committee is improving on its goal to more accurately quantify learning. However, as the faculty body knows very well, there are multiple factors that contribute to how much students learn in a class. There are variables under our control such as curriculum and teaching styles, but there are outside influences beyond our control. Controlling for all of these variables may not be possible when administering these studies.

The implementation of Openbook has provided this assessment with the most accurate, detailed, and exhaustive view a student's academic history. While this was a monumental tool in the analysis, even with this data it is still difficult to arrive at strong quantitative conclusions. The students entering Harold Washington College fall on a large spectrum of academic preparedness, access to recourses, and outside support. They enter our college at multiple points and their academic paths are nonlinear. Due to the inherent nonlinear, multi-variant, highly correlated structure it is imperative that caution be used when making generalizations regarding learning, and even more so when applying policy. While the data ascertained in the assessment elucidated our understanding of student learning in the Natural Sciences its interpretation was only possible with multiple conversations between Assessment Committee members and Natural Science faculty members. Without this context this assessment would not have been possible.

Phil Vargas

The Invisible Hands Influencing Your College's Assessments: Unit-Level Assessment

The Fall 2016 semester marks the first time when every academic department at HWC is represented by a unit-level assessment liaison. This is very exciting, and it represents a significant investment in faculty-led assessment by our local administration.

We hope to see this level of engagement in assessment continue and indeed grow as assessment work continues to expand in every department. In the articles that follow, the diversity of the different assessment projects will become evident. In addition to exploring a range of subjects and addressing a number of distinct questions about student learning, the projects represent a range of phases in the assessment process. While some are just getting off the ground, others have been in a consistent cycle of assessment for a number of years.

As different as the projects are, the component that unites them is their focus on student learning. Faculty in every department are engaging in these assessment efforts in order to better understand how our students are performing relative to course- and program-level student learning outcomes, and based on that information, to better serve our students in terms of pedagogical approaches and curricular recommendations. Please reach out to your department liaison with ideas for future assessments, and continue to support the assessment efforts going on within your department and across campus. Thank you for being part of such a vibrant culture of assessment here at HWC!

Erica McCormack

This Weird Biological Trick Will Blow your Mind: Biology Unit-Level Assessment

In spring of 2016, our department began our first unit-level assessment work. During that semester, a pilot assessment tool was developed and administered to several sections of Biology 114 (Introductory Biology for non-majors) and Biology 121 (Introductory Biology for science majors). A total of 96 students participated in the pilot assessment. The main goal of the assessment was to access students' ability to identify the main cellular organelles and describe their functions. The assessment was made of several multiple-choice questions and a cell diagram that were designed to be closely aligned with the learning outcomes of the courses.

The data analysis was completed this semester using OpenBook data. Of the 96 students who participated in the pilot assessment, we were able to analyze data for 94 of them (the ones that provided valid student IDs). About 46% of the students scored 70% or higher on the assessment. Our initial question during data analysis was how did the majors perform versus non-majors. While students in Biology 121 did better on the pilot assessment than students in Biology 114, there was no statistical significance in the difference of overall means between the two courses. This could be due to the small sample size of Biology 114 students.

We then decided to refine our analysis criteria and instead look at several academic characteristics of students who met the learning outcomes of the assessment (i.e scored 70% or higher) versus the ones that did not meet them (scored 69% or below). In particular, we decided to look for any correlations between the following academic characteristics and the assessment score: total number of successfully completed courses (defined as courses completed with a final grade of A, B, C or P); highest course completed in Natural and Physical Sciences, and highest completed Math course.

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Untited Cartoon about a Student Describing her Learning Style. n.d. 2006. SERC. Carlton.edu. Web. 5 Dec. 2016. <https://serc.carleton.edu/details/images/5929.html>

No notable linear correlation was found between total number of successfully completed courses and assessment score. Due to the fact that we could not evaluate the academic history of students who took classes outside of CCC, it is possible that successful completion or non-completion of courses may not be a good indicator of successful performance on the assessment. When analyzing highest course completed in Natural and Physical Sciences, all courses taken in these disciplines were used, since many students' highest course was the course used for the assessment (Biology 114 or Biology 121). No notable linear correlation was found between the total number of successful courses taken in Natural and Physical Sciences and assessment score. In terms of highest completed Math course, courses ranged from Developmental Math (Math 98/99) to courses in the Calculus sequence (Math 204 and above). Slight positive linear correlation was found between successfully completed highest math course and assessment score ($p=0.0287$, with significance of $p<0.05$). It is possible that due to small sample size ($n=94$), this correlation may not hold for a larger sample size.

This semester, we administered the same assessment to a larger number of students enrolled in various biological courses ranging from 100- to 200-levels. In particular, the assessment was given to 7 sections of Biology 121, 3 sections of Biology 114, 3 sections of Biology 115 (Human Biology course for non-majors), 1 section of Biology 122 (Introductory Biology II for science majors), 1 section of Biochemistry 209 and 2 sections of Microbiology 233. The results of the assessment will be analyzed using OpenBook data. We are planning to look at the same academic factors that were examined in the pilot assessment. In addition, we are going to investigate whether there is any correlation between course history in English composition and the assessment score. We will also analyze assessment questions to see which questions were missed the most by students who have met the learning outcomes versus the ones that did not meet them.

Aigerim Bizhanova

This Will Restore your Faith in Society: Social & Applied Sciences Unit-Level Assessment

History was picked last semester to conduct department level assessments within the Social Science department (now the Applied and Social Science Department) because several fields of history are taught (U.S., African-American, Latin America and World). This semester we continue to focus on history with two goals. One is to analyze data from last semester's pilot project

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and the other is to create a new assessment tool that measures the use, comprehension and retention of history vocabulary.

There was a solicitation to department historians to form a steering committee. There are a total of three members on the committee, Juanita De Toro (Latin American History) and Domenico Ferri (US Urban History). The Department Unit Level Liaison is Nick Ceh U.S. and World History). The committee communicates both by meeting in person and by email. Committee members and history faculty members are kept abreast of new information by email.

Last spring six sections of history assessed writing and research skills. Data from that assessment have been collected and are currently being analyzed. We hope to learn about areas related to thesis-writing where our students are strong as well as where they can improve, and based on the results of the data analysis, we will discuss ways to better support student learning relative to thesis-writing.

This semester, the committee agreed to create a history vocabulary assessment tool that measures the following Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs):

1. Identify trends, events, peoples, groups, cultures, and institutions covered in this course;
2. Communicate orally and in writing about the content; and
3. Construct historical narratives by identifying patterns of continuity and change and referring to specific primary and secondary sources, maps, and/or artifacts.

A tentative rubric has been created. The committee is in the process of refining the rubric as we fine tune the structure of the assessment we will use. We will conduct a pilot of the vocabulary assessment by the end of the fall semester 2016 in the following classes: two sections of History 112 (US history Survey II) and one section of History 142 (World History Survey II).

The current plan is that, based on what we learn from the pilot at the end of this semester, all history committee members will conduct a vocabulary pilot assessment in their history classes next semester for spring 2017.

Nick Ceh

5 Tricks to Learn Spanish in 5 Minutes: English Language Learners Unit-Level Assessment

This will be the first assessment done at the unit-level in the World Languages/English Language Learners department, so a precedent is being set and this assessment will serve as a model to develop and improve in future semesters.

Since Spanish 102 deals principally with introducing the past tense, or preterite tense as it is known in Spanish, the assessment will be limited to investigating students' ability to recognize and produce the past tense of regular verbs. This tense is taught at the beginning of the course, so faculty expect that the forms will have had time to settle in the minds of the students by the time the assessment is piloted at the end of the Fall 2016 semester. Also, because the tense of regular verbs in the preterite involves the use of accents, it will be important to assess how mindful the students will be in the application of accents.

The assessment will be brief but comprehensive. It will consist of two sections, each twelve items long. The first section will measure students' ability to recognize and select (out of a multiple choice format) the proper form of a regular verb with the proper accents in the preterite tense. For the second section where students are asked to produce the correct form of a verb in the preterite tense, it will be fill-in-the-blank. The same 12 verbs will be used in the recognition and production sections, but they will be paired with different subjects. Each item will be assessed based on a rubric that checks for correct form, tense and accent.

Although this assessment is brief, faculty teaching Spanish classes are hopeful that it will be informative in what it reveals about student learning as well as common student errors regarding the preterite tense of regular verbs. Since this is a foundational element of student learning in Spanish, the results of this assessment will be of interest to language faculty teaching introductory as well as higher-level courses.

Margarita Chavez

You Won't Believe What this Library has to Offer: Library Unit-Level Assessment

Standards and Framework

In light of the new Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework and changes in the HWC library, we decided to reevaluate our outcomes and assessment tools. The Framework, formally adopted in January of 2016, is a departure from the Standards, which had guided academic libraries since 2001. Whereas the Standards lent themselves fairly seamlessly to assessment, the Framework is more difficult to pin down.

In practice, the Standards summarized information literacy as the ability to know when information was needed, to find it from a variety of sources, to evaluate it for credibility, and to use it ethically. The Framework takes a more holistic approach to information literacy and consists of several overlapping frames of understanding about information, espousing such ideas as "Authority is Constructed and Contextual, "Information Creation as a Process," "Information Has Value,"

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"Research as Inquiry," "Scholarship as Conversation," and "Searching as Strategic Exploration." These frames work ultimately toward leading students to recognize their relationship to information and its context.

Designing a Tool

The Framework asks librarians to foster a much deeper engagement with student learning than the Standards, and given the time constraints of single-class sessions (or one-shots, as we call them), it would be easier to cling to the past than embrace the present. To answer this challenge, library faculty created and responded to a survey to determine what we thought were the most pressing issues we needed to teach in our one-shots. We agreed to determine a consensus and then make sure that those concepts were taught in all of our general instruction sessions. The results of the survey led us to change our outcomes for one-shots and helped us create a new assessment tool.

Evaluation and Critical Thinking	Narrowing Your Topic	Research Questions and Thesis Generation	Search Strategies and Boolean Operators	Database Interface Navigation	Subject Headings and Keywords	Outlining the Research Process	OPAC and Call Numbers	Peer-Reviewed vs. Popular Press	Citations and Plagiarism	Subscription vs. Open internet	Library website navigation	left blank
2	5	3	4	6	9	1	10	8	7			
9	4	11	3	7	5	8	2	6	10	1		
10	7	8	6	5	11	2	4	9	3		1	
1	5	11	2	6	3	8	7	4	9			10
5	1	4	2	9	8	3	10	6	7			11
2	1	4	3	6	5	9	10	8	7			
1	6	7	3	2	8	9	10	4	5			
10	8	9	2	1	3	7	5	4	6			
5	4.625	7.125	3.125	5.25	6.5	5.875	7.25	6.125	6.75			

Figure 1. The smaller numbers highlighted in yellow indicate the concepts that librarians agreed were most importnat to teach in one shot instruction sessions. Specifically, Search Strategies and Boolean Operators, Narrowing a Research Topic, Evaluation and Critical Thinking, Database Interface Navigation, and Outlining the Research Process were agreed to be most important.

We met to formally standardize what we teach in our one-shots, after which we were able to create an assessment tool for those particular outcomes. The ten-question survey is designed to capture student experience information via their ID numbers, to assess learning, and to provide an opportunity to self-report effort.

We will pilot the assessment tool in a few classes this semester to ensure that it can be used within the confines of a 50 minute session. If it proves feasible, we will administer the assessment more broadly in the spring in all "general research" instruction sessions, in which the professor does not specify that a particular lesson should be taught (e.g.: MLA or open internet resources, etc.) This process has already been beneficial, as it has allowed us to reassess what is important about our teaching, but we hope that the data we will gather in the spring will show us which areas of our instruction need to be improved.

Todd Heldt

The Hot New Calculator Everyone is Talking About: Mathematics Unit-Level Assessment

This semester we will finalize the unit-level project that started in the spring 2015 semester. The primary goal of our departmental assessment was to determine whether Math 207 (Calculus I) students carry any mathematical deficiencies at either the developmental algebra, college algebra, or calculus level. The assessment tool developed for this project consisted of a short quiz with two questions based on the same student learning outcomes (these two SLOs are related to the concept of "optimization"). Each question in the tool was divided into three parts; each part aimed to isolate a particular level (developmental algebra, college algebra, or calculus) of mathematical proficiency. A pilot assessment was run at the end of the spring 2015 semester and a bigger assessment took place during the spring 2016 session.

The data analysis of the spring 2015 pilot's results indicated that students performed well on the assessment's first (purely mathematical) question, yet they performed poorly on the second (real-world, applied context) question. At the time, it appeared that students misunderstood the instructions of the second question, so instructions were modified in the spring 2016 version of the assessment tool in order to avoid potential confusion. Students' course history obtained from OpenBook also indicated that several students in the pilot's sample had already completed a math class at a higher level than Math 207. We would like to keep track of the proportion of students who repeat a class in future assessments performed at this level, as it will be interesting to learn about these students' mathematical proficiency.

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A bigger assessment was run during the spring 2016 semester in four sections of Math 207. As mentioned before, the tool was revised in order to improve instructions and avoid confusion in the applied question. Also, the scoring rubric was enhanced in order to better evaluate responses that were insightful, but that did not use calculus concepts (with enough insight, it was possible for students to answer some of the questions in the tool using only algebraic concepts although that approach contradicted the assignment instructions). Moreover, due to a student's comment on the pilot reflecting fear that the results would be used to evaluate his/her instructor's performance, instructions to students and faculty were modified to reassure everyone involved that the assessment's results will never be used for evaluation purposes (this is true of all assessments conducted through the HWC Assessment Committee).

The sample from the spring 2016 assessment consisted of 57 students from four sections of Math 207. A preliminary analysis of the data reveals that, overall, students performed slightly better than in the pilot. The proportion of students meeting the overall learning outcomes was 64% (the pilot's proportion was just 58%). A student met the assessment's outcomes if his/her overall score was greater than or equal to 12 points (out of the total 18). As with the pilot, students obtained high scores on the first purely mathematical question. Nevertheless, still a significant proportion of students performed very poorly on the second applied "calculus optimization" question. The proportion of students that scored less than 6 points in that question and, consequently, were far away from meeting the outcome was 36% (the pilot's proportion was 45%). Finally, it appears that improved instructions in the applied question decreased the rate of nonresponse in the final part of the tool's second question (this part asked students to provide the "dimensions" of an area; namely the width and the length). Only 23% of students did not attempt the last part at all (the pilot's proportion was 42%). Even though this no-attempt proportion decreased, it is still disappointing to see students' inability or unwillingness to completely solve a problem with real-world context.

One conclusion that we can draw from the analysis of both the pilot and the bigger assessment, is that Math 207 students tend to be very good at solving purely mathematical questions, but they definitely struggle with applied questions. We theorize that most students have a tendency to give up on "word problems;" perhaps due to the additional attention and reading comprehension skills that are needed in order to answer these type of questions. In order to test whether this is a unique issue at the Math 207 level, we decided this semester to run a small pilot assessment in a couple of Math 140 (College Algebra) classes. We used a modified version of the applied question (the modifications made would allow a student in a college algebra class to answer the question without using any calculus concepts). The goal of this small pilot was to see whether students in Math 140 also tend to give up on "word problems" like the Math 207 students appeared to do. Faculty volunteers ran this pilot during weeks 15 and 16 of the semester. A preliminary analysis of the results indicates that the proportion of Math 140 students who did not at all attempt the last part of the tool is approximately 20% (similar to the 23% proportion of Math 207 students who did

Book study: AC members were happy to receive the book Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide, 2nd edition. Thank you to VP Sarrafian.

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not attempt it either). Hence, it seems that the issue with applied questions is not unique to Math 207 and is also present at the Math 140 level.

The main recommendation, based on the results of this assessment project, is to look for ways to increase student exposure to problems that have a genuine real-world context. Also, mathematics faculty should consider looking for ways to incorporate in their usual assessments questions that enhance students' reading comprehension. Lastly, future unit-level assessment projects in the Math Department should continue to assess student learning outcomes that involve real-world situations and, in particular, "word problems." It will definitely be interesting to learn how students in other college-level classes like statistics (Math 125-1) or general mathematics (Math 118) perform when facing similar questions like the ones Math 207 faced in this assessment project.

Finally, our department will begin a new unit-level assessment project next semester under a new liaison. Currently, faculty in my department are interested in assessing student learning outcomes from Math 118 (General Mathematics). A formal plan should be drafted early next semester.

Fernando Miranda-Mendoza

This Will Restore your Faith in Humanity: Humanities Unit-Level Assessment

In the grand scheme of things, I'm rather doubtful that what I am about to describe will make anyone's top ten list of "Crucial Events that Occurred in the Fall of 2016," but in terms of excitement and long term usefulness I'd suggest they rank somewhere in the range of "holding a warm loaf of bread in your hands" and far above "a poke in the eye with a sharp stick." Possibly less exciting than that last one, but definitely more useful.

Humanities assessment remains in varying states of development for each of our disciplines. In 2014, music faculty developed a tool for evaluating student juried performances (vocal and instrumental) for the Applied Music courses and associated data collection. Two years on, we met to reflect on and discuss the usefulness and usability of the original measure both in terms of evaluating the juried performances and in the data collection that is crucial to program analysis and reflection.

As a consequence of those discussions, we made important revisions to the forms and the process. The forms were separated and simplified to make them conform to how the evaluators approach their task and increase the consistency in how they are used across a wide pool of educators. A second change will be piloted this coming fall when we reserve an IPad cart so the jurors can have access to an IPad during the juried exams, thereby directly entering the data as they complete their evaluation and eliminating separate data entry, which had proven onerous and become a bottleneck. Assuming that everything goes according to plan, we expect to have data to analyze and consider on the 70+ student performances taking place this December before the spring semester starts just three weeks later, a long tantalizing prospect that seems to be, finally, at hand.

Fine Arts faculty members continue work on analyzing the reams of data from their 2015 pilot assessment. Because of the ambition of the original project—collecting student responses to 13 different works of art and then evaluating each response using a work-specific rubric—the findings are voluminous to the point of unwieldy, but a revised rubric is being used to pull out some interesting misconceptions that will be potentially helpful for future versions of their assessment efforts, not to mention informative for their efforts to streamline the tool and the process toward efficiency, thus warranting the time and the energy and creating another source of Humanities Department excitement.

While you're probably quite agog that we are so lucky to work amid such thrilling developments and wondering how it is that we could go about our daily tasks in the midst of the low-level, but persistent hum of anticipation, you will likely be downright shocked to hear that I have saved the best for last. Did you forget that philosophy is part of the Humanities department? I doubt it. How could you? But did you know that the Philosophy faculty members are developing an assessment, too? Maybe you're thinking, "Katie, bar the door." Maybe you're thinking, "What new madness is this?" Maybe you're thinking, "That'll be short—all they do is go on and on about how the only thing they know is that they don't know." I know, I know. Fair criticisms, all. Perhaps it seems that we are dreaming the impossible dream, going a bridge too far, reaching for the stars but forgetting to keep our feet on the ground, but I assure you that my hat is not a bed pan and this assessment is not a windmill! And the excitement in our department is palpable.

Philosophy faculty debated (and not endlessly!) among a variety of choices for investigation across our classes before agreeing to pursue information related to our stated objective of helping students improve their critical reading skills and master three objectives that are present in the syllabi of all eight of our philosophy classes: 1) Read and interpret primary, philosophical texts and ideas in them with justification; 2) Distill the essential pieces of an argument (e.g., conclusion, premise(s), key terms, assumptions) from a text; and 3) Analyze arguments for their structure and quality (e.g., validity, cogency, soundness). We have agreed to develop a pilot assessment, based on the structure of reading comprehension tasks used in standardized exams like the ACT, LSAT and GRE that will also be combined with a survey about student beliefs and behaviors related to reading and learning. Why a survey, too? Great question!

In their article, "Reading and Learning Strategies in the 21st Century," Literacy researchers Simpson, Stahl, and Francis

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identify ten recommendations based on a meta-analysis of research on reading and learning, including, "Understand the Impact of Students' Beliefs about Reading and Learning on Their Performance in College." Researchers consistently find that many students come in to classes with attitudes or sets of expectations about reading that are problematic. Simpson, Stahl and Francis write, "[S]tudents' beliefs are important because they serve as the filter through which they decipher and interpret their academic tasks," and so their attitudes affect their expectations of what is required of them, affecting their preparation and depth of learning (18). They also discuss the differences of attitude in regard to agency and responsibility, indicating a correlation between successful students and their sense of responsibility for their learning. Later they write of the differences in attitude about texts between expert and novice readers in engaging history texts.

Their observations about the crucial importance of students' beliefs about learning and their correlation with mastery (or not) of the course content fit with what I have seen in my own and others' classes over 12 years of teaching. A few years ago I happened across a blog article called "Public Education: The Reading Problem"(2011) that distinguished between the binary thinking of unskilled readers ("I get it or I don't") and the process oriented thinking of skilled readers ("What do I get so far?") and the impact of their assumptions about how reading and interpretation works. The binary thinkers await that magical moment of lightning strike, while the skilled readers engage in a deliberate, constructive process of interpretation building. Unskilled readers expect that the text will reveal itself (and that if it doesn't, either the text is a failure or they themselves are), whereas skilled readers bring "curiosity, patience, and imagination" to the reading experience along with an expectation that they will make their own meaning of it. It is the difference between (forgive the oxymoron) a passive engagement and an active one with the text.

By combining the survey with the direct measure of students' ability to read an unfamiliar passage analytically and critically, we hope to gain some insight into students' attitudes and beliefs about reading and learning, as well as their actual reading behaviors so we can target specific, research based obstacles to student success in our teaching and see, among those students who return to take a second or third philosophy class, whether students' beliefs and abilities change over the course of their experiences with us. If we do this right, this tool will give us some insight into helping more students grow as critical readers and shift their attitudes about reading and learning from those that pose obstacles to success into those that support and engender intellectual flourishing. And that, good friends, is exciting.

Dave Richardson

Become a Hollywood Actor Overnight: English, Speech & Theater Unit-Level Assessment

The educational value of fine arts classes is one of the core debates at all levels of education, particularly when topics related to budget and practicality are at the forefront. As a community college serving students who predominantly seek degrees in terms of their potential for earning power, rather than having the luxury of studying art for art's sake, do our courses have value? That is the question that the Fall 2016 assessment in the English, Speech, & Theater department fearlessly set out to determine.

The first task was centered around identifying what and how to assess practical value. Dean Thompson from College to Careers, in conjunction with the 2013-2014 interdisciplinary Soft Skills Committee, had identified a set of personality traits,

Jenkins, Stephanie. *Untitled Cartoon*. 2014. KNILT. Albany.edu. Web. 5 Dec. 2016. <http://tccl.rit.albany.edu/knilt/index.php/File:Schoolies.jpg>

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abilities, and characteristics that are most valued in terms of obtaining and maintaining employment in professional settings. These identified "Soft Skills" aligned with what business research and career advisors reported from their own studies. The Soft Skills committee condensed these skills into a list of specific skills with measurable outcomes, which were embedded into non-credit professional preparation seminars. However, the Committee also believed that our general education courses imparted some of these skills inherently, and in some cases, they were measurable course outcomes. My assessment sought to pick up on my work in this committee, looking at the soft skills in terms of the student learning outcomes in our department's fine arts offerings: literature, creative writing, and theatre arts classes.

This fall, our department offered 39 sections of fine arts courses: 24 sections of literature representing nine different course offerings, 2 sections of Creative Writing, and 11 sections of Theatre Arts, representing six different courses. I gathered SLOs from all but two of these courses, so 37 of our 39 fine arts classes were assessed, giving an accurate overview. The Soft Skills were divided into eleven measurable outcomes, such as communication skills, presentation skills, persuasion skills, and basic grammar. Six additional soft skills were identified in terms of their application to the SLOs (that is, without basic mastery of these skills, meeting the requirements to pass the class would not be possible): technology skills, cultural awareness, and networking skills, for example.Based on the SLOs listed in the syllabi, literature and creative writing classes impart a variety of important abilities to our students. Communication, persuasion, critical thinking, and grammar are all vital skills that every one of our fine arts offerings includes directly in its SLOs. The most surprising and wonderful outcome revealed by the assessment of course syllabi, however, was the strength of our Theatre Arts courses. Proficiency in areas such as selling, networking, interviewing, dependability, resilience, meeting management, interpersonal communication, and stress management are directly addressed and measured in our Theatre Arts classes, particularly those which are performance-based. Theatre Arts 132 (Theatre Production, Direction, and Management) was the sole class that required mastery and measured every one of the quantifiable soft skills that our own Career Center has identified as vital for student success in professional careers.

The strength of these findings leads us to a hopeful conclusion about the power of fine arts, particularly theatre arts, classes for our students. Next steps include collaboration with Dean Thompson, College to Careers, the Business Department, and Advising in terms of course recommendations for students in professional majors. With Harold Washington's specialization in business, Theatre Arts classes are an optimal choice for both the fine arts requirement and electives. All of our fine arts courses, especially theatre, can very positively impact our students as future professionals.

As a department made up of dozens of former literature, poetry, creative writing, theater, and communications majors, it's sometimes challenging to reconcile our commitment to liberal arts with the demand for business and career education. Speaking the language of both populations, imparting fine arts appreciation and skills to our students as not only a vehicle of passion for art itself but also in the service of their own professional development, can be one way to build a lucrative bridge between both worlds.

Amy Rosenquist

You Can Make $230K Working from Home: Business Unit-Level Assessment

The work this semester followed up on departmental assessment work from the previous semester. The Business Department's goals are to better understand the students' ability to demonstrate fundamental knowledge of business concepts and to perform elementary business calculations prior to entering a department pathway of study. The department also hopes to show subsequent improvement over time for the same learning objectives prior to transferring or graduating from a departmental pathway. The work over time could help demonstrate programmatic efficacy and help improve pathway curriculum based on any trends and issues uncovered via the assessments.

Last semester a forty question "entering" student skills survey was developed as an initial assessment draft with the idea that additional questions would be added to the assessment for "exiting" students. In discussion with faculty and assessment peers this semester, the draft was further refined down to a thirty question/sixty minute survey to be given both as an "entering" and "exiting" survey. The questions were selected based on examples found from district-level and national-level research of similar assessment efforts. The thirty questions were aligned with key student learning outcomes that were identified as fundamental to further education and success in business careers.

After reviewing the pros and cons of several options, the survey questions were then formatted into a Blackboard survey. An introduction and instruction piece to accompany the survey was written to assist students in completing and to guide faculty in administering the assessment. It included suggestions about how to help encourage high participation rates through offering class participation credit or other appropriate means. The revised assessment and documentation was discussed with discipline faculty a final time for any additional input and to encourage faculty to promote participation.

The survey will be administered as a pilot assessment for entering and exiting pathway students during the last two weeks of the current fall semester beginning in week 14. The assessment can therefore also serve as a general study tool for students preparing for finals and ideally reinforce the same

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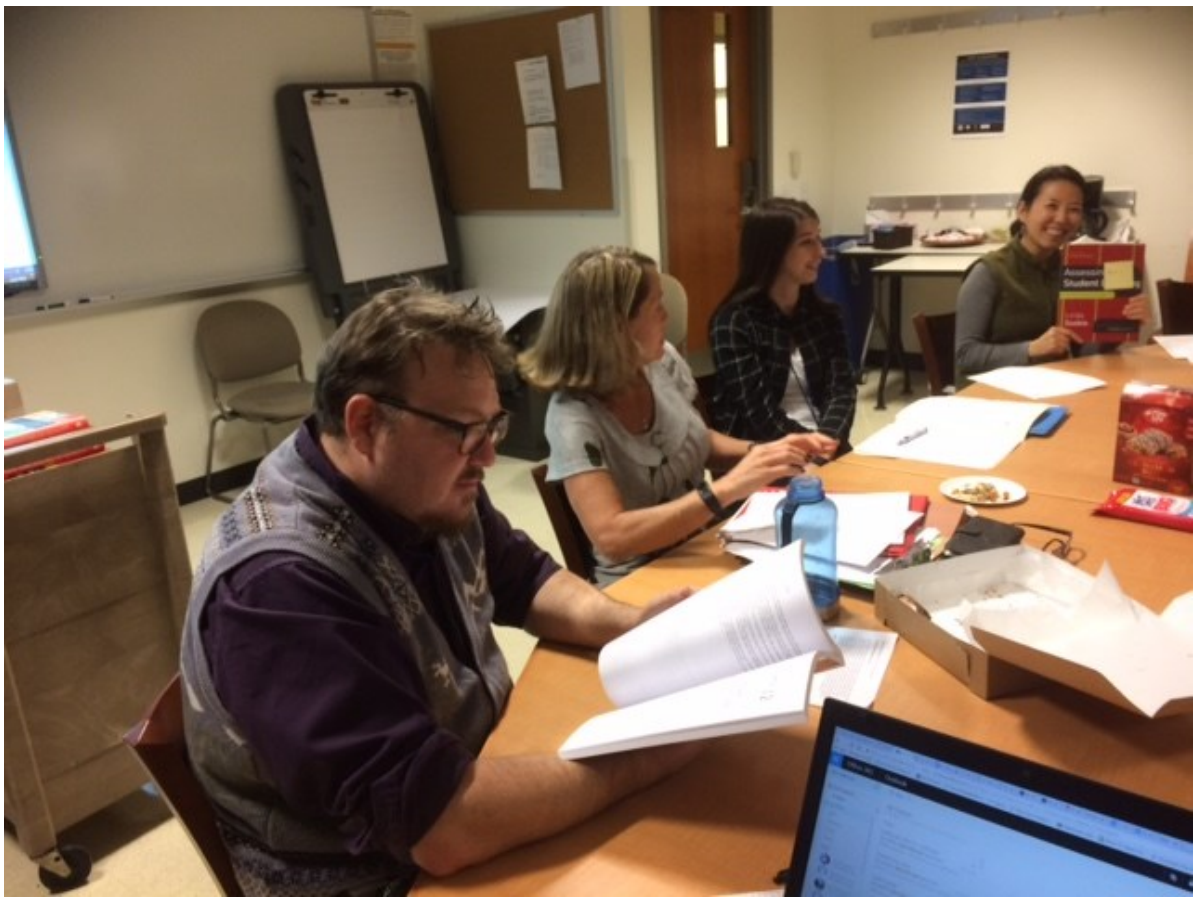

AC members continuing to enjoy Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide, 2nd ed., that VP Sarrafian got for us.

concepts they have been studying all semester.

Classes where the "entering" assessments would be conducted were identified based on Business and Professional Services pathway prerequisites. The classes that will administer the "entering" assessments include Business 111 (Introduction to Business), Business 141 (Business Mathematics), and Business 181 (Financial Accounting). The "entering" assessment will be provided to all 17 sections of Business 111, 3 sections of Business 141, and 10 sections of Business 181.

Classes that will be given the exiting survey were identified based on typical transfer requirements and how common the classes are to later Business and Professional Services pathway sequences. The classes for the "exiting" survey include Business 182 (Managerial Accounting), Business 269 (Principles of Management), and Economics 202 (Principles of Economics). Social and Applied Sciences faculty were engaged to secure their support for the Economics class since that is offered beyond the purview of the Business department. The "exiting" assessment will be provided to all 5 sections of Business 182, 7 sections of Business 269, and 10 sections of Economics 202. The sections include both on-line and face-to-face classes.

The assessment will be analyzed over the winter break and the results will be discussed with administration and faculty in preparation for the fall semester 2017 full roll out. In future semesters, entering students will be assessed during the first three weeks of classes and exiting students will be assessed appeared that students misunderstood the instructions of the during the last two weeks of classes. Any issues with particular questions, formatting and/or instructions from the pilot this semester will be investigated and resolved prior to the fall semester. The Business department is excited about the opportunity to better understand student learning via assessments, and we encourage all departments to strongly consider similar efforts as a way to improve as well as to help bolster any documentation increasingly required by accreditation bodies.

Bral Spight

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16 Tell-Tale Signs You're an Artist in the Making: Art & Architecture Unit-Level Assessment

Different approaches to assessing the AFA Studio Art Degree

As a unit level liaison focusing on how to assess the AFA Studio Art degree, I have a few different options to pursue. One is to assess the individual courses offered within the degree to measure how well the syllabus outcomes are being met. A second is to assess a program level outcome to see how well it is met across all the disciplines within the degree. A third is to assess a student in their final semester of completing the degree to determine if they are fully prepared for transfer.

Each type of assessment yields different data, and choosing which to pursue is the real challenge. It is challenging due to the need to decide which type of assessment will provide the information that is most important and relevant to know at this moment about student learning.

Course-level assessment often yields results with the most actionable data. This is due to being able to measure how well particular course syllabus outcomes are met. The recommendations can be more targeted and specific since they are tied to particular outcomes. These recommendations are then shared with the instructors so they can be appropriately integrated in the course when they teach it again. So information learned in one semester can be directly applied to the next semester.

Each of the assessment options are equally valuable and yield data that can be turned into actionable recommendations. They all should be done at some point in time to understand what is happening at the individual course level, the program level and what is the level of student transfer preparedness. Course level assessment of the AFA Studio Art Degree has taken place every semester since Spring 2013. Two courses (Art 144 "Two-Dimensional Design" and Art 131 "General Drawing") have a history of being assessed and four more courses (Art 115 "Photography", Art 145 "Three-Dimensional Design", Art 196 "Ceramics" and Art 197 "Advanced Ceramics & Sculpture") will be added to the rotation over the next three semesters. So the next stage is to continue to expand how the AFA Studio Art degree is assessed to prioritize where our energies should be applied.

To decide which to prioritize going forward, we needed to first understand what information each type of assessment captures. Since the AFA Studio Art degree is a transfer degree, the assessment options are looked at through the lens of how they relate to 4-year schools. The AFA degree is the first two years of a BFA degree. So our expectations are that HWC students that complete the AFA degree can start 300-level classes at their transfer destinations with the same level of experience, quality and preparedness as their new peers.

Course-level Assessment

A common approach to assessing the studio arts is the single course or cohort assessment. This is especially true in two-year schools where degree completion is low, because the goal of most students is to transfer. Since the majority of art students transfer before completing the degree, program level assessment doesn't yield as much information for us as course-level assessment. There is more to be gained from identifying an individual course with multiple sections to get information that yields significant data.

Another approach is to group courses together as a cohort for a particular assessment to get a slightly larger snapshot of how students are doing in a specific area of study. Typically, courses within a particular discipline (medium) in our department make a good cohort. All the ceramic courses, the photography courses or the drawing courses are examples of potential cohorts. This allows us to track the success of students through their journey of learning a specific medium. Another potential cohort would be the foundation courses students take in the first two semesters of the AFA Studio degree pathway. This allows for the tracking of students in the courses that are commonly taken for early transfer purposes or preparation for the studio elective courses.

Program-Level Assessment

Program-level assessment means different things to different schools. All schools look at completing a degree or certificate as an opportunity to assess students in the final semester or year of completion.

A four-year school does assessment at two specific points. The first assessment is a portfolio review and oral defense of the art work created at the 100 and 200 level. Successful completion of this assessment and review allows the student to be officially accepted into the art department as a declared studio art major. The second assessment is in the final two semesters when a student has completed all their 300 and 400 level courses. This takes the form of mounting an exhibition of work, giving an oral defense and creating a professional portfolio. Typically, a portfolio contains 20 artworks, appropriate writing examples, C.V., artist statement and a general letter of intent for MFA program applications.

A two-year school offers only 100 and 200 level courses, so program level assessment is more challenging. A portfolio review, a capstone class and some sort of oral defense are examples of what can be done at the associate degree level. A two-year student needs these three things to prepare them for

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successful transfer. Currently we don't run program-level assessments, but I created a program-level assessment of studio art critiques that will be run as a pilot in Spring 2017. We don't offer a capstone or portfolio class either, but there is great interest in the department to do so in the future.

Capstone Experience

Most schools have something they consider a "capstone experience" as part of their degree curriculum. It usually takes the form of a class where a student creates a portfolio, artist statement, letter of intent and C.V. These are all items needed for the student to successfully pursue their next step in their educational or professional career.

Another "capstone experience" takes the form of an exhibition combined with an oral and written defense of their artwork. This also prepares the student for their future in the arts.

These are normally 1-credit classes and can be team-taught or have a primary faculty with a few guest presenters with specific areas of expertise. Having a capstone experience is of the upmost importance to assure the student has all their proper paperwork and portfolio needs completed in a professional manner. The studio art faculty hope to look at the feasibility of having some kind of capstone or portfolio class created for the AFA Studio Art degree in the future. Research is now being done to see what options are best to pursue and how it can be incorporated in the AFA Studio Art -pathway appropriately.

Going Forward

The current course-level assessments for Art 144 and Art 131 will continue to be administered. Much has been learned from these assessments that has benefitted how faculty approach these courses. Shared vocabulary lists have been created and distributed to all instructors at the start of semesters to reinforce the key terminology contained in the assessments. General resource handouts for some of the foundational skills have been created and provided to instructors. They are able to then disseminate the information as they feel appropriate to supplement their own course materials. The hope is that the new course-level assessments will also lead to improved resources and supplements to support instructors and student learning. The addition of program-level assessment and a potential capstone class are projects that will be addressed over the next four semesters.

Paul Wandless

Gain 3 Pounds of Carbon with these 3 Tricks: Physical Science Unit-Level Assessment

Tests, tests, and more tests! When I think back to my time in college, it seems like I was always either studying for a test, taking a test, or trying to relax after a test. And my alma mater didn't have anything approaching the assessment culture that we have at HWC. Here in the physical science department a standardized pretest/posttest program has been implemented for our entire chemistry sequence. If I thought I took a lot of tests, my students take far more!

And what is particularly surprising is how accepting our students are of these assessment efforts. If I had shown up to class on the first day and found myself presented with a standardized exam, I probably would have pinched myself to make sure I wasn't having one of those I-forgot-about-a-test nightmares. But many of our students have become accustomed to taking a test in the first week of class, and their cooperation has made it much easier to get useful data. Thanks, students of HWC!

This semester we embarked on two big projects. The first was an examination of the pretest results for two classes which follow General Chemistry I in our chemistry sequence – General Chemistry 2 and the Survey of Organic and Biochemistry. Both of these courses take the same pretest, which assesses their mastery of material from the previous semester. We were interested to know if there were any topics which stood out as being particularly well-understood or difficult; when we crunched the numbers, there were some interesting findings.

It was something of a relief to know that our students can in fact do simple stoichiometric calculations (using a balanced chemical equation to predict amounts of a product given an amount of starting material) – this is a key learning objective in first semester chemistry, and it is used constantly in the second semester as well. Similarly, students showed notable familiarity with resonance, a topic which is used extensively in the Survey of Organic and Biochemistry. But other topics were much more challenging, such as kinetic molecular theory and the description of what happens at the atomic level when a solid dissolves in water. This was an eye-opening result that helps explain some of the difficulties our students have had in General Chemistry 2 with kinetics and solubility equilibria.

It should be noted, however, that since many of our students in these courses have not taken General Chemistry 1 at Harold Washington College, it is not appropriate to use pretest data

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from the second semester to evaluate the success of the first semester course. Instead, we need to look at the posttest results for the first semester course. This is our second big project, and it is still in progress. We are analyzing data from numerous sections spanning four semesters, so we are hoping that our findings will be the most rigorous and statistically significant results we have reported to date.

In the meantime, we also completed a smaller project: the creation of a pretest for Organic II. The tool we had been using was a standardized exam that lasts two hours. While our students are generally patient with our assessment efforts, there are limits! So we have made an assessment tool that can be completed in less than one hour. We will pilot it in the spring – stay tuned for what are expected to be some interesting findings!

Allan Wilson

Inundated By Clickbait...

While the Library acknowledges both the economic reasons for creating clickbait and the psychological reasons for consuming it, we urge faculty and students to check out our collection of LibGuides at http://researchguides.ccc.edu/. Collaboratively created by the seven City College libraries, these guides illuminate every aspect of the research process. You may never fall for clickbait again!

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 1046. 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 Carrie Nepstad (see contact info at left).

Newsletter layout: John Kieraldo

Assessment Committee

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