

The Assessment Quarterly

Assessment vs. Evaluation

by Paul Haspel, English

At my former college in Maryland, the general response to the arrival on campus of the assessment movement was to hope that it would go away.

A number of my colleagues in the college's faculty felt that assessment was but the latest of several trendy fads to come out of the nation's graduate schools of education and down the pike towards us. There was a feeling that the business community nationwide had strong-armed state legislatures to "do something" about a supposed problem of students graduating from college without needed skills. According to that logic, the state legislatures would now be strong-arming colleges into "doing something."

The feeling was that assessment would be just another hoop that we would have to jump through -- more forms to fill out, more paperwork. It seemed like just what we *didn't* need. Like Heartland, my former college in Maryland is the kind of place where people willingly embrace a variety of responsibilities; but this seemed like a bit much to ask.

Soon, however, we got a strong sense that assessment wasn't going away. As representatives of our college, preparing for regional reaccreditation by the Middle States Association, attended a self-study institute in Philadelphia, one of the featured speakers, a high-ranking official of Middle States, said, "I will do whatever I have to do to get you to assess." It made me think of Lou Gossett Jr. as that gunnery sergeant in *An Officer and A Gentleman*, promising to use any means, fair

or foul, to test the mettle of the officer-candidate recruits under his training. It was clear that a college's success in assessment was going to be linked to reaccreditation.

In an attempt to better understand assessment, representatives of the college's assessment team attended an Assessment Institute in Braintree, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. Another team later attended a similar assessment conference in Charleston, South Carolina. Guest speakers were brought to the college, including a director of a postsecondary teaching and learning institute at Penn State, an eminent assessment scholar from the University of Connecticut, a dean who has had great success embedding assessment in the curriculum at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

In spite of our best and most conscientious efforts, confusion persisted -- among the Assessment Team itself, as well as throughout the college community. A typical comment from one of my colleagues in the faculty might have gone like this: "Assess? How do I assess my students? Well, they take a midterm, write two papers, and take a final, and I give them a grade to assess how I did. That's how I assess the students."

Eventually, we looked at such comments and realized that we had not done enough to differentiate between **assessment** and **evaluation**. The quote in the above paragraph is a classic example of evaluation. All of us who teach here at Heartland Community College evaluate the work of our students. Using tests, papers, lab practicals -- a variety of evaluation methods, depending

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Analogies

Thanks to everyone who contributed their ideas about assessment as requested in the last issue of the *Assessment Quarterly*. The prompt was: Assessment is to teaching as _____ is to _____. Here are the responses.

Don Cavallini: Assessment is to teaching as the yoke is to the egg. You can't understand the importance of the yoke until you break the shell of the egg. So too is the art of teaching. You can't understand what a teacher does through the act of teaching until you understand what the students understand regarding what teaching is all about. This understanding comes via the process of assessment.

Stephanie Kratz: Assessment is to teaching as an atlas is to a road trip. Like a map helps drivers find their way on a road trip, formative (or mid-semester) assessment guides teachers by revealing the paths of students' understanding.

Allan Saaf: Assessment is to teaching as research is to successful product development.

Alaina Winters: Assessment is to teaching as tasting is to cooking.

Upcoming Assessment Events

Contact a member of the Assessment Committee if you are interested in attending an assessment event. Some funding is available.

Assessment Institute in Indianapolis
November 3-5, 2002

Features opportunities to learn and practice assessment techniques in workshop settings, interact with national leaders in the field of assessment, and learn assessment strategies via a Best Practices Fair. Conference is geared for both faculty and administrators, with program tracks for those interested in student affairs, health professions, general education, majors, community colleges, and methods. More information: www.planning.iupui.edu.

Teaching and Learning Conference

November 14-15, 2002, Springfield Renaissance Hotel, Springfield, Illinois

Sponsored by the Illinois Community College Faculty Association (ICCFA), this annual conference features an address by Dr. Dan La Vista of the Illinois Board of Higher Education, concurrent and poster sessions, and a delegate assembly. Registration (due November 8) is \$85 per person or \$75 for groups of 10 or more. More information: <http://www.iccfa.org/2002%20Conf/T&LConf02.html>

Lilly Conference on College Teaching

November 20-24, 2002, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio

Workshops, seminars, and featured speakers will present at this 22nd annual conference addressing excellence in college teaching. More information: <http://www.units.muohio.edu/lillycon/>

Assessment Fair for Community Colleges

February 25, 2003, South Suburban College, South Holland, Illinois

50-minute sessions on assessment of student learning will be presented to faculty and academic administrators from Illinois community colleges. For more information or to submit a presentation proposal (due December 10), contact Beth Beno at 708-596-2000 x 2333 or mbeno@southsuburbancollege.edu

When does Critical Thinking begin?

Report from the Critical Thinking Outcomes Team

During the past few meetings, the Critical Thinking (CT) Learning Outcomes team (Lisa Cole, Matt Felumlee, Thuong Jongky, and myself) have debated the issue of "When does CT begin?" It is an interesting philosophical question that I have discussed with other experts in the past.

When you examine Bloom's Taxonomy, which starts at (1) knowledge, (2) comprehension, (3) application, (4) analysis, (5) synthesis, and ends with (6) evaluation, the argument over whether level 2 or level 3 reflects where CT begins surfaces. Many will propose that the comprehension of knowledge represents early stages of thinking. Others argue that until a learner applies that comprehension, no real CT has occurred.

Even consulting the "experts" shows that they do not agree either. Looking at Alverno College's approach to CT, they define the first level as making careful and accurate observations. This can be equated to comprehension especially in light of the second level, which states that a learner makes justifiable

inferences (analysis). Richard Paul defines CT as having two components: (1) a set of skills to process and generate information and beliefs, and (2) the habit, based on intellectual commitment, of using those skills to guide behavior. He further states that CT is NOT: (1) the mere acquisition and retention of information alone, (2) the mere possession of a set of skills, and (3) the mere use of those skills. I take all of that to mean that he sees CT only beginning when a learner *applies* those skills gained from knowledge and comprehension.

The CT Learning Outcomes team is proposing that CT begins when a learner demonstrates the level 3 abilities, but we are still seeking input. What do YOU think? Call, email, or stop by a CT team member's (Lisa Cole, Matt Felumlee, Thuong Jongky, or John Muench) office with any input.

Richard Paul's discussion can be found on the web at: <http://www.criticalthinking.org/University/univclass/Defining.html>

Coming Attractions: January 9 Pre-Semester Workshop

by Stephanie Kratz, English

The Spring Workshop will draw both on the ideas from the Fall Critical Thinking Workshop and on the work of the Critical Thinking Outcomes Team (CTOT) who are writing CT General Education Outcomes. Whereas in August, we discussed definitions for critical thinking, in January we will discuss assessment of critical thinking.

At the workshop, the CTOT will present the new critical thinking outcomes for discussion and review. Faculty will workshop these outcomes in small groups by discussing each statement and how he or she uses it in class. Significant insights from small group discussion will then be shared with the whole group.

Once again, we will draw on the expertise of the faculty who work right here at HCC rather than inviting an off-campus speaker. Bring your ideas, questions, and concerns about how you assess critical thinking in your classes.

The workshop will be held January 9, 2003 from 10:00 a.m. to 12 noon with lunch to follow. The workshop will be repeated from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. for adjuncts and other faculty who cannot attend during the day.

Effective Communication in the Classroom

by R. John Muench, Chemistry

We have all been to presentations or seminars given by people who are very good at delivering the message as well as keeping it interesting. A few come to my mind like Dr. Douglas Eder from SIUE at the drive-in assessment conference at HCC this past summer or Dr. Tom Angelo at last year's ICCFA conference. I have often wondered why they are so good at what they do – this summer I discovered what their secret is.

While at the NISOD conference this past summer, one of the interesting sessions that I had the privilege of attending was given by Donn King and Anita Maddox from Pellissippi State Technical Community College in Knoxville, Tennessee. Both of them are Communication instructors and they have teamed up to help both educators and business people become more effective communicators.

The premise of their workshop is simple – what if we treated our lecture as if it were a speech? They explained that in any speech, you want to have a clear and explicit main idea organized into an introduction, body, and conclusion. They illustrated this by expressing what they wanted to accomplish in the workshop followed by a seemingly unrelated anecdote. They

promised at the end that this anecdote would be clear. They then proceeded to discuss the other elements of oral communication that most of us learned in Speech 101 (but may have forgotten). They then ended by articulating the meaning of the anecdote in the context of the workshop.

Not only was this a very entertaining hour, but it also illustrated concepts that all teachers should use in the classroom during lectures. Thus, when I am delivering lecture material, I begin by preparing them with what are the important points for that day and when possible relating that to something they already know (but don't understand WHY). Then, I develop the concepts around the main points followed by a conclusion, which includes the practical side of why this is important. The difficult part, of course, is to come up with the 25 – 30 anecdotes to keep the interest.

For more information about how to improve your communication skills, Donn King has a website as well as an e-zine (its called *Squiggles*) that you can sign up for at: <http://www.soapboxorations.com/> He also has past issues of the e-zine as well as additional sources that may help.

CT Workshop Review

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in which we help students in our courses understand and use critical thinking.”

My thanks to all of those who participated and contributed in this exercise. This data has been helpful to the CT outcomes team to establish the “climate” of CT at HCC. Currently, the team is developing the CT statements that will be used across the college. The format will be similar to the Problem-Solving statements in that a two-column approach will be used and the statements will also be leveled. Look for these to be presented to the faculty at the Spring Workshop, before the start of the Spring semester.

Assessment at the Child Development Lab and Learning Center

by Johnna Darragh, Early Childhood Education

Assessment at the Child Development Lab and Learning Center (CDLLC) mirrors what is considered best practice within the field of early childhood education. Assessment practices focus on (1) identifying children's strengths and areas needing strengthening; (2) the use of assessment for effective curricular and environmental planning; and (3) the use of assessment as a tool for communication.

With regards to identifying children's strengths and areas needing strengthening, the CDLLC moves beyond a traditional approach often manifested by the use of standardized testing, and instead strives to present a developmental picture of the individual child. To achieve this picture, a variety of strategies are utilized, including portfolios, developmental profiles, and ongoing sampling of children's work.

Portfolios: CDLLC staff make purposeful collections of children's interests, progress, and achievements over time, allowing for rich documentation of children's experiences throughout the year. Portfolio documentation serves many useful purposes, primarily documentation of the powerful and expansive growth of young children throughout their early childhood years. These portfolios can be extremely effective in communication with parents, administrators, and relevant staff, and serves as a useful planning tool.

Developmental profiles: Developmental profiles allow staff to explore and document targeted areas of children's development. These profiles might take the form of diaries documenting such things as child's motor milestones, or likes and dislikes; or anecdotes describing children's first attempts at sharing, or resolution of a conflict; or the transcription of vivid words describing a fall leaf. Through developmental profiles, stages of children's development can be documented in a way that captures the astounding accomplishments and dramas of youth.

Sampling: Work sampling allows staff to demonstrate children's passions, areas of interests, and provides a useful documentation of growth over time. Sampling focuses on the child as an individual, and speaks to the idea that the work children create is reflective of their individuality.

The use of each of these tools allows the staff at the CDLLC to recognize children as individuals, and design an environment that embraces each child's uniqueness. Additionally, these assessment practices allow for communication that respects each child's need and right to develop at his/her own pace, in his/her own way, with his/her own amazingly individual self being reflected.

Assuring Academic Rigor in the Open Door College

by Robert J. Exley, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Iowa Western Community

Editor's note: As faculty at an open admissions college, we at HCC often face student resistance to academic rigor and therefore we face challenges to our academic integrity. The following article, which addresses strategies to meet those challenges, was originally published in *Innovation Abstracts*, a publication of the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD). The concepts of academic integrity that Exley describes here are directly linked to assessment of student learning. Take note of the bulleted list of "tough questions" related to academic integrity, and you will find questions about formative, course, program, and institutional assessment. Thank you to Dr. Exley for granting HCC permission to reprint excerpts from his article.

The community college is a distinctly American contribution to higher education. Nowhere else in the world can one find such a commitment to providing access to higher education and to the belief that institutions have the obligation to support individuals desiring to secure the education necessary to change their lives. This noble endeavor also brings with it significant challenges—one of which is maintaining academic rigor.

Indications are that more students than ever before expect to achieve high grades in college but appear unaware of the commitment and sacrifice required to accomplish their expectations. When one contemplates the combination of open-door admissions and student expectations, it is easy to appreciate the challenge of establishing and maintaining academic rigor. A relentless vice, with twin jaws of student expectations and open-door admissions, exerts a continuous force upon faculty while multiple economic, cultural, and political factors press upon the academic policy-makers simultaneously. Finally, the "right heart" attitude of compassion and activism that motivates community college academic leaders to support an open-door admissions policy may also create an impression that academic rigor is less important than increased access. It is precisely these challenges that demand our attention.

What is academic rigor?

Academic rigor can be defined as the set of standards we set for our students and the expectations we have for our students and our-

selves. Rigor is much more than assuring that the course content is of sufficient difficulty to differentiate it from K-12 level work. Rigor includes our basic philosophy of learning we expect our students to demonstrate not only content mastery but applied skills and critical thinking about the disciplines being taught. Rigor also means that we (higher education professionals) expect much from ourselves, our colleagues, and our institutions.

It is one thing to set high expectations for our students by assuring the difficulty of a course through significant amounts of content knowledge to be gained or complexity of the materials to be learned. It is another thing entirely to accompany such expectations with a commitment to put similar emphasis on the expectations we have for ourselves by defining our success in terms of direct measures of learning that occur with each student. In short, if we are serious about academic rigor, we must increase our own mastery of our discipline content, improve our ability to apply our learning, and model critical thinking for our students.

What is academic integrity?

The accompanying concept of academic integrity may be thought of as two distinct, but interwoven, threads. One thread is moral integrity. In this sense, academic integrity becomes the commitment we have to hold one another accountable (students and colleagues alike) for meeting and/or upholding our standards and expectations. The second is structural integrity and involves the idea that each aspect of the

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Academic Rigor

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educational experience must be designed with the integrity of the entire experience in mind.

In November 1999, The Center for Academic Integrity distributed copies of "The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity" (www.academicintegrity.org). This powerful treatise identifies the core values necessary for academic integrity and at its outset identifies the premise for why academic integrity matters: "Academic integrity is essential to the success of our mission as educators. It also provides a foundation for responsible conduct in our students' lives after graduation" (p. 2). We must consider the moral definition of academic integrity as we deal with the issues of academic rigor.

As for structural integrity, one must think of integrity in regard to how each aspect of an academic experience fits with and supports all other aspects of the experience. We must ask ourselves the tough questions such as:

- How do the activities within any given course build on and support the student learning within the course from day one to completion?
- How does a specific course support and build on a student's program of study?
- And in the broadest sense, how does a learning experience, activity, course, or program of study fit across disciplines and departments to achieve the mission of the institution?

In essence, do the student learning experiences provide both an excellent means for learning content and lay the foundation for responsible conduct in our students' lives after graduation?

If we are to achieve this goal of true academic rigor and integrity, we must begin to think from a "systems" definition where each component of an academic experience is strategically designed in light of how it affects the whole experience. The systems-thinking approach recognizes that no component of the college operates in a vacuum; thus, the potential impact on the entire institution is always taken into account when curricular changes are proposed.

Assessment Committee

The Assessment Quarterly is brought to you by the Assessment Committee:

Francine Armenth-Brothers (Nutrition)
 Barb Borg (Nursing)
 Tom Clemens (HFAHS Division Chair)
 Paul Haspel (English)
 Steve Herald (Dean of Instruction)
 Stephanie Kratz (English, AQ editor)
 Janice Malak (Sociology)
 John Muench (Chemistry)
 Allan Saaf (VP Instruction)
 Padriac Shinville (Division Chair for Alternative Learning and Developmental Education)
 Katherine Starks-Lawrence (Business)
 John Wardell (Technology)

Please see any AC members with questions or concerns regarding assessment at HCC.

Critical Thinking Workshop: A Review and Analysis of the Data Gathered

by R. John Muench, Chemistry

In August of 2002, over 50 faculty and administrators met to discuss and share their concepts of Critical Thinking (CT) utilizing the small group process. Groups were intentionally organized to be diverse with respect to full-time and adjunct faculty, administrators, and by discipline. Here is a summary of what happened that day.

The first question posed to each group was: **What are the key phrases / terms that you associate with the concept of CT?** Most groups mentioned Analysis / Analyzing (8 of the 10 groups) as one of their key terms. Other common responses (number of groups) were: Problem-Solving (5), Evaluation (4), Logic (4), Asking Questions (3), Application (3), Synthesis (3), Reflective (2), Skepticism (2), Inquiry (2), Investigation (2), Assumptions (2), and Thinking Globally (2). The list is reflective of the fact that a Critical Thinker employs a wide range of skills while on task as well as the fact that CT happens on many levels. In addition, several groups posed questions about the process of CT. Two of these express the current task before the CT Outcomes team quite well, "How do we bridge from basic skills to a higher level?" and "How do remedial skills fit in?"

The second task for each of the groups was to write a definition of CT as it relates to the key terms or phrases. Some of the selected ones are:

- Critical Thinking is a process upon which inquiry, analysis, and logic are used to reach an evaluation and application to a particular context.
- (Critical Thinking is) one's ability to assess and evaluate information using questioning, judgment, and skepticism to develop a logical plan of action while using reflective thinking.
- Critical thinking is active thinking that builds upon inquiry, analysis, assessment, and evaluation, empowering the learner to move from simple to

complex modes of thought in a manner that recognizes the interrelated nature of academic disciplines and incorporates an awareness of the practical value of knowledge beyond the academic world.

- A self-reflective logical process used to analyze, synthesize and evaluate information, problems, and form solutions.
- Critical Thinking is the formation of purposeful, reflective judgments (synthesis, analytical, evaluative, etc.) based on various processes of questioning.
- A style of thinking driven by curiosity that recognizes the use of logic and reasoning of data that leads to a defensible conclusion.

In each of the above definitions, a similarity can be seen in that CT is seen by faculty as a process that evolves and builds as the learner grows. We should not expect our students to be excellent critical thinkers as they enter our courses, but rather that the process must be nurtured and allowed to mature.

Finally, a Reflector's Report, which focused on the small group process, was solicited from each group. While only half were returned, I'll assume that some of the generalizations cited applied to the other groups. First, these reports cited that the group worked very well together and that one of the strengths was the diversity of the group. "It was interesting to note the diverse approaches to defining critical thinking. Debates and discussions were lively and expanded beyond the time periods assigned." Second, groups cited the fact that they had to come to a consensus on many issues, which involved some negotiation of differences. Lastly, one Reflector's Report summarized the overall process as, "It was interesting to note the group adapted and used the components of critical thinking (i.e. defining, analyzing, synthesizing, applying, evaluating) as it approached the assignment of defining and discussing ways

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Assessment vs. Evaluation

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on the discipline -- we evaluate, or place a grade value on, the degree to which a student has demonstrated proficiency in the discipline area. An excellent student gets an A, a satisfactory student gets a C, and so on. We are all used to that.

Assessment is quite different because it seeks to measure growth on the student's part, not simply to evaluate student proficiency. To put it another way, assessment asks the student: What do you know now (at the end of a class, course, or curriculum) that you did not know before (at the beginning of that class, course, or curriculum)?

Let's say, for example, that Albert Einstein signs up for a freshman-level physics class. How is he likely to do in the class? Because he is Einstein, he will no doubt get an A; that will be the instructor's **evaluation** of Einstein's proficiency in Physics 101. But what would Einstein have gained from the class that he did not know before? If the instructor were to **assess** Einstein's knowledge of physics at the beginning and at the end of the semester, he or she might find that the originator of the Theory of Relativity already knew everything that was taught in the course.

Once we spread that idea around the college, a stronger sense of the difference between evaluation and assessment began to take hold among the college's faculty. People began to realize that they were already doing assessment. Every time you ask students what they know at the end of a class that they didn't know at the beginning, you are doing assessment. And as assessment became part of the institutional culture of the college, we found that the way we approached teaching and learning at the college was changing for the better.

Thank You . . .

. . . from the Assessment Committee to all faculty who completed a faculty needs survey. The Committee is in the process of compiling the results and will report them to you in the next issue of the *Assessment Quarterly*.