

The Assessment Quarterly

A Publication of the Heartland Community College Assessment Committee

9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning

1. **Assessment of student learning begins with educational values.** Assessment is a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice begins with a vision of the kinds of learning we value for students and strives to help them achieve. Educational values should not drive what we chose to assess but how we assess. Assessment threatens to be an exercise in measurement rather than a process of improvement.
2. **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Assessment should reflect the use of diverse methods, including those that call for actual performance.
3. **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.** Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions
4. **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also to experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information out outcomes is of high importance—where student's "end up" matters greatly. To improve outcomes, we need to know about student experiences along the way—the curricula, teaching, and student efforts that lead to the outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve their learning. *(continued on page 3)*

in program and course design, and from knowledge of student's own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, the assessment process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.

Inside

Message from the Chair	2
9 Principles of Good Practice <i>continued</i>	3
Course Embedded Workshop	4
Culture of Assessment	5
Assessment Events	6

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Message from the Chair



The spring semester is well under way and your Assessment Committee is hard at work. Many of the web pages and basic information regarding Assessment have been updated and can now be found on both the Heartland website as well as off the old Intranet pages. If you are looking for these on the homepage, simply move your cursor over the “Employee Center” near the top of the page and select Assessment from the pop-up menu. This will take you to the front page for Assessment. Then using the navigation on the left hand side as well as links within each page, you can discover many other pages. Later, under the “Other Stuff” section, I will add a site map for those in search of a particular topic or page.

My goal with the web pages is to continue to add content based on suggestions from both the committee and other faculty. I would like to add more links to other Assessment websites and include some more quotes on the first page. I’d also like to add a section where faculty can describe their successful assessment activities. Thus, if you have any ideas, comments, or suggestions for content on these pages, please contact me.

Our second major project for the Committee includes implementation of the new Critical Thinking outcome statements into master syllabi. These were introduced to the faculty during the Spring Workshop and can be found on the Assessment website. Phase One of the plan will be to work with Division Chairs (who will then consult with the appropriate faculty) to incorporate these, where appropriate, into the syllabi of the twenty-seven largest credit hour generating courses. The goal is to have these completed by the Fall of 2003.

Our third major project is the pilot of the new method for assessing the General Education Outcomes. Currently, Sociology 101 and Math 131 have been chosen for this new endeavor. Our pilot will collect a common “artifact” from these two courses that can be used as both an evaluative and assessable tool. A team of Assessor’s will assess this “artifact” based on the General Education Outcome that the course outcome is linked. Very soon, I will be sending out a document describing what role the Assessor’s will have as well as how much they will be paid.

R. John Muench

Assistant Professor of Chemistry

9 Principles of Good Practice (*cont'd*)

5. **Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.** Assessment is a cumulative process. “One-shot” assessment can be better than no assessment and improvement is fostered in a series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the progress of individual students or cohorts of students; collecting samples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement.
6. **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. While assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community and outside the community. Faculty plays an important role, but assessment’s questions cannot be addressed without participation from student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals outside the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the aims and standards for learning. Assessment is a collaborative activity aimed at all parties involved in improving student learning
7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment begins with questions of decision-makers that involves them in the process of gathering and interpreting of data. The approach must produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable. It means thinking in advance how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return results, it is to inform and help guide continuous improvement.
8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment alone changes little. It must be linked with quality teaching that is visibly valued and worked at as a goal of leadership, and learning outcomes are sought and seen as an integral part of decision making.
9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** There is a stake in public education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about how our students meet goals and expectations. That responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information, it possess a deeper obligation—to ourselves, to our students, and to society—to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

*Excerpts taken from AAHE Assessment Forum:
www.aahe.org/assessment/principl.htm*

Highlights from Course Embedded Assessment Workshop

By Janice Malak

Two members of Heartland's Assessment Committee (Katherine Starks-Lawrence and I) attended a workshop at ISU on January 24, 2003, that detailed a plan for implementing embedded assessment measures in courses. Dr. Larry H. Kelley, CEO of Kelley Planning and Educational Services, LLC, was the facilitator. In his workshop, he helps colleges and universities develop assessment plans that do not require additional work from what is currently happening in the classroom. He espoused the values of using embedded assessment as a way to link the goals of the institution or program to what is occurring in the classroom.

The morning session was devoted to an assessment plan that mirrored the plan piloted by HCC's assessment committee. The assessment plan includes specifying intended outcomes, as determined by faculty, as being results oriented, easily understood, and measurable. It also involved identifying courses related to those outcomes, selecting measures and techniques for assessment, assigning techniques to courses and embedded measures, specifying assessment criteria (establishing benchmarks), evaluating student performance on embedded assessment measures, and then evaluating students performance on course embedded measures. In this scheme, the work done by the student is graded before the work is scrutinized for assessment purposes. Dr. Kelly presented several sample assessment plans that he has used at various institutions. This workshop also looked at the task of developing rubrics for use in the embedded assessment process.

The afternoon session involved a hands-on group activity where the participants were charged to focus on one intended outcome, prepare an assessment plan and a rubric to measure the selected outcome. Groups were arranged by academic discipline and general education. I was fortunate to be in the general education group. This group chose to focus on problem-solving skills. Our outcome statement contained three parts:

Part One - determine if students could identify relevant research questions, determine if students could or could not identify appropriate strategies for investigating the question, and, finally, determine how students would collect and evaluate ideas and information related to the research question. Our group purposely left it vague since assessment outcomes in general education looks at assignments in various disciplines. Our group consisted of history, sociology, English and philosophy faculty members. The discussion included how the guidelines would pertain to a research project in each of our courses. We decided our common assignment would be to write a research proposal (faculty looked at different issues based on their discipline).

Part Two - write a rubric. The objective for the rubric was that "students will be able to demonstrate competence, in the following areas, through use of a research proposal project..."

Part Three – develop a four-point scale and apply to the three areas pertaining to the research question. The scale ranged from competence to incompetence on each area. *(Sample four-point scale on next page)*

The Culture Assessment

By Janice Malak

The word assessment is like a dirty word in some higher education circles. The prevailing attitude at numerous local institutions is that ‘grades are good enough’. When the idea of assessment is discussed, many faculty bristle at the thought, that someone may require or ask them to do something different or additional in their classroom. In fact, that is why we are here, to give something to our students and then measure if we have lived up to our original goals. There are so many variables involved in that simple statement, that some faculty have issues with assessment.

The word assessment is like a dirty word in some higher education circles.

Today’s literature on assessment suggests that the culture surrounding assessment is found in three groups, all of them operating at the same time and in the same place. One group is called the ‘assessment cheerleaders’. They are very interested in the assessment process and are usually the ones who volunteer to serve on assessment teams and task forces. They also attend conferences and apply

what they learned in their courses. The next group is called ‘apathetic faculty’. They view any assessment that may take place in the classroom as just ‘something more to do’, akin to taking attendance or assigning mid term grades. They do not necessarily have any bad feelings toward the process of assessment; however, they also are not pro-assessment either. The final group consists of those who possess negative attitudes toward assessment and tends to be very vocal. This group uses the notion of academic freedom as their anchor to help them form their argument against using additional forms of assessment in their courses. **Which group best describes your attitude towards assessment?**

Since we are living in an age of accountability, assessment practices will continue to gain in importance. First for internal use and for purposes of accreditation, and second, for the local community, state, and others who have a stake in what occurs at institutions of higher learning. Primary and secondary education institutions have long been under mandates to assess their students. This is a trend that many scholars see expanding to include higher education. The message here is that higher education should choose an assessment method, now, before the process is mandated.

Four-Point Scale

1	2	3	4
Incompetence - no question posed	Incompetence - question unclear, unfocused, unanswerable or inappropriate	Competence - question is manageable and answerable - question needs more development	Competence - question is clear, manageable, and focused - relevant terms are defined.

At the end of the exercise, one of the participants suggested that instead of using a rubric in a table format, a checklist format would be easier for assessment purposes.

Upcoming Assessment Events

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 ext 2333 or mbeno@southsuburbancollege.edu

AAHE Assessment Conference

June 20-23, 2003, Seattle, WA
For more information go to: [Http://www.aahe.org/assessment/2003/](http://www.aahe.org/assessment/2003/)

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