

The Assessment Quarterly

A Publication of the Heartland Community College Assessment Committee

HCC Pilot Project a Success

This summer, the pilot project to assess the General Education Learning Outcomes (GELO) was completed by two teams of Assessors. This project was our first attempt to evaluate our GELO and replace the previous plan of assessing student's skills in the SOAR courses. The concept of SOAR – a capstone experience—was a good idea, but it had several problems. One of the problems was that only a small percentage of students—those receiving an AA or AS—would actually take the SOAR courses. Also, no methods were proposed on how the students would be assessed across the SOAR courses. Thus, a joint

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committee of the Curriculum & Academic Standards (CAS) Committee and the Assessment Committee (AC) proposed a new methodology—that produced this pilot project.

The pilot project sought first to focus on the top thirty credit-hour generating courses. Why, because these courses have the largest impact on our students and we could learn the most by examining this particular group of students. The list of 30 courses was reduced to 25 by removing the remedial courses. The next step was to seek out two volunteers from the list and Sociology 101 and Math 131 were

selected as the pilot courses. Then, a common artifact was developed in each of the two courses. This proved to be one of the first challenges—what type of student performance can be used to measure a particular GELO? For example, the Sociology 101 instructors initially decided to measure one of the Diversity outcomes, but soon realized that these outcomes were not easily assessable. Ultimately, they chose to assess the GELO C8 (Communication) by using a short essay assignment.

Once the common artifact was developed, it was given to a majority of the students in most of the course sections. Before instructors graded the artifacts (assignments), they were copied and submitted to the Assessment Committee. The committee removed any identifying marks (student or instructor names) and kept them in a safe place until the end of the semester.

Over the summer, two teams of Assessors assessed the artifacts for both courses by developing a rubric around the specific GELO statement. This proved to be another challenge. The rubric had to be generic so it could be applied to any artifact, yet it had to be specific enough so the Assessors could evaluate the specific assignment. In addition to developing the rubric, the team working on the math artifact needed to learn how to do the “math” in the artifact. Thus, a math instructor was brought in to “teach” the Assessors. **(continue on page 3)**

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Assessment Committee

R. John Muench
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Padriac Shinville
Alternative Learning &
Developmental Education
Division Chair

Doug Simeone
Psychology/Social Behavioral

Katherine I. Starks-Lawrence
Business
Editor/Publisher/Designer
katherine.starks-lawrence@heartland.edu

Jennifer Swartout
English
Co-Editor

Message from the Chair



Writing a Learning Outcome Statement

In the infancy of the College, faculty members were asked to write learning outcomes in their master syllabi. Like perhaps many of you, I was a bit befuddled by this. My simple response at that time was to just say, “Okay – my students need to learn chapters 1 to 12.” After being exposed to Alverno College’s system and attending many other assessment conferences, I now have a clear picture of what a learning outcome is and its importance. Thus, whether you are developing a new course or would like to update that old, tired master syllabus, I would like to share some of what I have learned.

First and foremost, a learning outcome statement must be assessable. How a statement is worded is the key component. For example, the statement “The students will show an appreciation for various forms of music,” is not easy to assess. This is because the word “appreciate” is difficult to quantify. Does a smile (real or fake) while a song is playing indicate “appreciation”? Thus, the ambiguity of the statement is evident.

One of the useful tools in creating an assessable statement is to use Bloom’s Taxonomy as a guide. Bloom developed his taxonomy over fifty years ago and it is based on the different levels of learning. The six levels, in order of increasing difficulty, are: 1) Knowledge, 2) Comprehension, 3) Application, 4) Analysis, 5) Synthesis, and 6) Evaluation. The first goal of writing a learning outcome statement is to decide at what level of learning do you seek for the students. Is it merely comprehension of the topic? Or do you want to see students take the information and synthesize it into a new, unique solution? Every course and outcome is different, so each faculty member would need to decide this based on his or her experiences. Once the level has been decided, choose an action verb from the appropriate level. The levels can be seen at: <http://www.hcc.cc.il.us/committees/assessment/bloom.html>.

From the earlier example about “appreciating music,” suppose that the instructor determined that level four from Bloom was desired. The statement could be re-written: “Describe and contrast the elements found in various forms of music.” The means to assess this statement is fairly straightforward and simple. In addition, the student most likely will also understand his or her responsibilities. During the semester, a student will know that they need to identify the elements that are unique to each type of music and then have to describe and contrast these on a test, in an essay, or a class discussion. The same can also be said for the role and responsibility of the instructor in the classroom.

Once again, if you are thinking about developing a new course or updating an old one, this should give you an idea of how to write an outcome statement. If not, please feel free to consult with anyone from the Assessment Committee before undertaking this task.

R. John Muench, Assistant Professor of Chemistry

Assessment Committee 2003 Accomplishments

The Assessment Committee in its second year of formation has continued to oversee the College's assessment efforts. The following accomplishments could not have occurred without the support of the administration, committee members, faculty, and staff:

Workshops

A Fall 2001 workshop focused on Critical Thinking in the classroom. Over 60 faculty members attended and, placed in small groups, defined critical thinking while sharing examples of how they used critical thinking in the classroom. Their responses were used to construct four new General Education Learning Outcomes (GELOs).

A Spring 2003 workshop focused on assessing critical thinking in the classroom and provided an overview of the new pilot project—to assess the GELO—to over 100 faculty members who attended.

Spring short-series workshops were:

(1) *Assessment 101* provided an overview of assessment and a “how-to-guide” to get started, (2) *What is Critical*

Thinking involved a discussion lead by English faculty on what critical thinking meant to them and how they assessed CT in the classroom, and (3) *Clarifying Expectations in the Classroom* focused on the importance of sharing course objectives with students.

Critical-Thinking Learning Outcomes

In the Fall 2002, Matt Felumlee, Lisa Putnam-Cole, Thuong Jongky, and John Muench established a new set of General Education Learning Outcome (GELO) statements because the prior learning outcomes did not address the topic of critical thinking.

Pilot Project

During Fall 2002, members of both the AC and CAS held joint meetings to discuss the SOAR courses, which were intended to assess the GELO. However, no assessment data was collected and it was decided to end SOAR by developing a new method of assessment—the pilot project to assess GELO. **(continue on page 4)**

Pilot Project *(continued)*

The second team working on the sociology artifact was not provided with background information from the sociology faculty on how the material is presented in the course. Since this is important, in the future, a discussion with the faculty who teach the course and the Assessors will take place.

The process of evaluating the artifacts using the rubrics was another challenge. Each member of the Assessor team scored a subset of the artifacts. The scores were compared and discussed. The biggest and most important discussions occurred when scores varied by more than one point. In many cases, each team would discuss why they gave a certain score. This led to many discussions about the rubric itself. In the end, both teams re-wrote their rubrics to reflect the new insights learned from the discussions. In the future, after the rubric is written, the Assessors will practice scoring a few artifacts and then refine the rubric until each of the rubric point level is clearly understood.

The first time through any process is a learning experience. Since the project was a success, the Assessment Committee plans to continue this project in the future. Ultimately, we would like to see a rotation developed for the top twenty-five courses where each

semester two courses are selected to collect artifacts. Since, this semester has already started, that may not be possible. For the spring semester, two to four courses may be selected to take part in this project. If you teach any of the courses listed below, talk to your fellow faculty members about developing an assignment or using an existing assignment that could serve as an artifact to assess one of the GELOs in your course. I will be happy to help any faculty in the development process— please feel free to drop me a line or stop by my office.

The Top 25 Courses are:

ACSM 101	ENGL 101	MUSI 150
ART 150	ENGL 102	POS 101
BIOL 114	HIST 135	POS 101
BIOL 116	HIST 136	PHIL 101
BUSN 110	HUMA 101	PSY 101
COMM 101	HUMA 250	SOC 101
EASC 111	HUMA 276	SOC 135
EASC 121	MATH 111	
ECON 101	MATH 131	

Calendar of Events

November 2-4, 2003

The 2003 Assessment Institute

Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
University Conference Center and Hotel
Indianapolis, Indiana

Hotel deadline: October 2, 2003 (1-317-269-9000)

Conference Registration deadline: October 17, 2003

Pre-Institute Workshops: November 2, 2003

Institute Dates: November 3-4, 2003

<http://www.planning.iupui.edu/>

<http://www.planning.iupui.edu/conferences/national/>

November 6, 2003

A Day at Alverno College: *Teaching and Assessing Student Abilities.*

The day-long conference is about ability-based curriculum design and how to integrate effective teaching of course content while developing student performance abilities. The registration deadline is October 9. For additional information, go to Web site http://www.alverno.edu/for_educators/day_long.html

Accomplishments (continued)

Web Site/Newsletter

John Muench, AC Chair, and Jackie Langhoff, HCC Webmaster, re-designed the Assessment web page. The new web site now houses archived copies of the General Education Learning Outcomes (GELOs) and statements, meeting minutes, and copies of the newsletter.

Members of the AC assisted in publishing four issues of *The Assessment Quarterly* newsletter. HCC faculty, AC members, and external sources provided articles for publication. Three hundred hard copies of each issue were distributed to Heartland's faculty and staff.

NEWSLETTER ARTICLES

The Assessment Committee is seeking articles about research, classroom assessment techniques, rubric development or use for publication in *The Assessment Quarterly* newsletter. The next newsletter deadline is **October 23, 2003**. Articles can be e-mailed to the editor, Katherine I. Starks-Lawrence at katherine.Starks-lawrence@Heartland.edu or to the co-editor Jennifer Swartout at jennifer.swartout@Heartland.edu. Please keep articles to 400 words.

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Heartland Community College
1500 West Raab Road
Normal, IL 61761