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Contact

Theresa Ford
Director of Educational
Assessment
tford@wooster.edu
(330) 263 - 2517

John Neuhoff
Chair of Assessment Committee
Assistant Professor of
Psychology
jneuhoff@wooster.edu
(330) 263 - 2475

Sarah Sidor
Administrative Assistant in
Educational Assessment
ssidor@wooster.edu
(330) 263 - 2245

Assessment Matters is a quarterly newsletter produced by the Office of Educational Assessment of The College of Wooster.

First AM Issue

Welcome to the first issue of *Assessment Matters* (AM), a quarterly newsletter from the Office of Educational Assessment at The College of Wooster. The purpose of AM is to inform and engage the Wooster community with timely national and local news, resources, and innovations in assessment at The College of Wooster, in the liberal arts, and in higher education. Submissions are invited and should be sent to Sarah Sidor, Administrative Assistant in Educational Assessment.

A National Dialogue

Published in September, the final report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education appointed by Education Secretary Margaret Spellings has generated both supportive and opposing responses and editorials in major news outlets, from college and university presidents, and from representatives of a variety of higher education organizations. The report, *A Test of Leadership, Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*, recommends a post secondary education system that is affordable, accessible, accountable, and consumer-friendly. The lack of accountability, according to the report, has exacerbated other difficulties and challenges of the higher education system.

The Commission acknowledged that colleges, universities, and accreditation agencies have increased their attention on student learning, but found that they have not done so effectively, publicly, comparably, or comprehensively based on the needs of parents, students, policymakers, and institutions of higher education. More specifically the Commission noted the following findings regarding transparency and accountability:

- Traditional measures of quality emphasize inputs rather than outcomes.
- Parents and students lack comparable data on individual institutions to determine how much students learn.
- Policymakers lack comprehensive data to make decisions about how to allocate taxpayer dollars effectively in higher education.

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- Colleges and universities need more comparable benchmarks in order to stimulate innovation and continuous improvement.
- Colleges and universities are not collecting data on nontraditional students, who are a growing segment of the student population in higher education.
- Accreditation reviews emphasize process at the expense of learning outcomes and costs, and are generally not publicly available.

Based on these and other findings related to access, cost and affordability, financial aid, learning, and innovation, the Commission recommended several changes to improve the U.S. higher education system. If institutions of higher education embrace and implement serious accountability measures, then the Commission maintains that its recommendations will be achieved more easily. It made the following recommendations related to accountability and transparency:

- creation of a consumer-friendly database with useful, reliable information on institutions that enables policymakers and the public to compare institutional performance,
- collection of improved data on the quality and cost of education, and
- measurement and reporting of meaningful student learning outcomes by colleges and universities.

The Commission highlighted the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) exam, the National Survey on Student Engagement (NSSE), and the National Forum on College Level Learning as examples of student learning assessments.

College and university presidents have issued responses to the report, as well as states and other organizations of higher education. *The Chronicles of Higher Education* commissioned commentary by five higher education leaders as a series of responses to the final report of the Commission. You can read the response from the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the

statement of American Association of University Professors, and the call to action by the state of Ohio at the following links.

Download and read the report from:
<http://www.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/hiedfuture/reports/pr-e-pub-report.pdf> .

Comment on the future of higher education by emailing HigherEdCommission@ed.gov or calling 202.205.8741.

AAC&U response to the report:
<http://www.aacu.org/About/statements/SpellingsFinalDraft.cfm> .

AAUP statement about the report:
<http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/GR/federal/FutureofHigherEd/sPELLrep.htm> .

Ohio has responded with Student Success Plans:
<http://www.regents.state.oh.us/accountability/index.html> .

Barbara Walvoord Visits Wooster

In early September Barbara Walvoord, Professor of English at Notre Dame University and Fellow of the Institute for Educational Initiatives, visited Wooster and led discussions and workshops on assessment with faculty, staff, administrators, Committees, and Program, Project and Center Directors during a three-day visit. Professor Walvoord has consulted or led workshops for faculty on teaching, learning, assessment, writing across the curriculum and classroom productivity at more than 300 institutions of higher education and serves on a number of national advisory boards. Her publications include *Assessment Clear and Simple: A Practical Guide for Institutions, Departments, and General Education* (Jossey-Bass, 2004) and *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment* (Jossey-Bass, 1998).

Walvoord met twice with the faculty, first with chairs of departments and programs and then with the entire faculty body. Within the historical and current contexts for assessment, she discussed the findings and recommendations of the Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Assessing student learning was not new for them, Walvoord reminded faculty. They had always done assessment – assigning grades; commenting on student papers; discussing strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in programs; and modifying pedagogy and the curriculum. What changed, according to Walvoord, was the language of assessment, a more systematic approach to assessment, and the need for documentation.

Walvoord described three components or steps to creating departmental or program assessment plans. The first step involved clearly expressing student learning goals. Identifying the qualitative and quantitative data requirements for directly and indirectly measuring the goals was the second step. She noted that the measures would have to be valid and reliable, and that indirect measures should be supported with direct measures. The final step recognized the feedback loop so that findings from the assessment process were considered in decision-making. Walvoord advised faculty to begin the process by identifying three to seven student learning goals, and to conduct assessment within the time and resource constraints of the department. Every department must keep a written record of its assessment process.

In other venues on campus Walvoord discussed the need for a wider institutional feedback loop. Establishing a broad institutional feedback loop required consideration of the organizational structure of the college and the flow of information, issues of accountability and strategic planning, and the opening of communication avenues for assessment findings to travel. She advised the Assessment Committee to create a flow chart of the institutional feedback loop that demonstrated how budgetary and resource allocation decision-making are tied to assessment findings.

Assessment Briefs

Wooster's Guidelines for Assessment

The Assessment Committee produced the *Guidelines for Assessment* for Departments and Programs, which can be accessed on the web at, <http://www.wooster.edu/assessment/Documents2/guidelines.pdf>. The *Guidelines* describe Wooster's integrated assessment plan for departments and programs. A schedule for departments and programs to submit plans to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and for the Assessment Committee to provide feedback is included. Examples are provided of student learning goals, direct and indirect methods of assessment, feedback mechanisms, and departmental assessment plans from Wooster. The questions that Assessment Committee members will ask when reviewing components of the plans and the integrated plan are also included.

ASSESSMENT Listserv

Join a national assessment listserv housed at The College of Wooster that was established for exchanging specific information on assessment of higher education at liberal arts colleges and universities. The purpose of the listserv is to share knowledge of current issues, practices and innovations in assessment of student learning in the liberal arts and to create a network of engaged professionals – faculty, staff, and administrators – in the assessment field in the liberal arts. If you wish to participate in the ASSESSMENT listserv, email tford@wooster.edu.

College of Wooster Assessment Website

Have you used the assessment resources at <http://www.wooster.edu/assessment>? The Spanish Department's Senior Exit Survey and the contents of its Portfolio for the Majors and other methods of assessment are posted. Rubrics used to assess Wooster's senior capstone experience, Independent Study, in Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Mathematics, and Spanish are listed. Other discipline-specific information is also posted, such as the skills

that biochemistry and molecular biology undergraduate students should have by the time they have finished their undergraduate education according to the American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology. The schedule of the Assessment Matters brown bag lunch series is featured on the assessment home page.

Assessment Exemplars

Five departments have agreed to produce assessment reports in addition to their departmental assessment plans during the 2006-07 academic year. Assessment reports by the Departments of Biology, Education, Geology, Philosophy, and Spanish will include assessment data and analyses. Chairs and faculty from these departments have agreed to speak at the *Assessment Matters* brown bag lunch series and to provide other assistance with Wooster's ongoing assessment activities.

Assessment Committee News

The Assessment Committee (AC), chaired by John Neuhoff, Assistant Professor of Psychology, meets weekly during Fall semester at 9:30 on Wednesdays in Galpin Board Room. Minutes and Annual Reports of the Committee are posted on the Assessment website.

AC has continued its assessment of the General Education curriculum. Bill Macauley, Director of Writing and Associate Professor of English, is completing a report on the second year of a four-year writing assessment project that was initiated by Nancy Grace. Lori Bettison-Varga, Associate Dean of Research and Sponsored Programs, is coordinating the effort to assess the quantitative reasoning or "Q" component of *A Wooster Education*. She has arranged for a December meeting with all Q-faculty to discuss preliminary findings of a pilot study and methodology for future Q-assessment.

The Committee produced the *Guidelines for Assessment* and has begun to review student learning goals of departments and programs as they are submitted. AC also hosts the *Assessment Matters* brown bag lunch series. Topics coincide with the components of the

integrated assessment plans of departments and programs, and precede the due dates for the plan components and integrated assessment plan.

Working to improve the Assessment website are Simon Gray, Associate Professor of Computer Science, who is compiling FAQs to add to the site, and Elys Kettling, Reference and Instruction Librarian, who is creating a glossary of assessment terms for the site. Please contact Simon at sgray@wooster.edu or Elys at ekettling@wooster.edu if you have an assessment question or glossary item to add to the site.

In October the AC met with The College of Wooster Board of Trustees and engaged in a lively conversation about assessment on campus. AC members described departmental and program assessment planning underway on campus, noted the need for a feedback loop in which budget and resource-allocation decisions are tied to assessment findings, requested additional resources for assessment purposes, and stressed the need for leadership in assessment to raise the level of educational excellence of the college.

Assessment Committee Members

John Neuhoff, Chair, Psychology

Lori Bettison-Varga, Geology	Iain Crawford, VPAA
Theresa Ford, Assessment	Anne Gates, Education
Nancy Grace, English	Simon Gray, Computer Science
Elys Kettling, Library	Henry Kreuzman, Philosophy
William Macauley, English	Thomas Wood, Music
Michael Thompson, Institutional Research	

Submissions to *Assessment Matters*

We are accepting submissions for consideration to be included in *AM*. If you have assessment news that is timely; assessment innovations in the liberal arts; assessment issues that may affect the liberal arts; and commentaries. Please submit materials to appear in *Assessment Matters* to Sarah Sidor (ssidor@wooster.edu). Materials should not exceed 400 words.

Assessment Calendar

Assessment Matters Brown Bag Lunch Series 238 Kauke Hall

- Oct 11, 2006** Wooster's *Guidelines for Assessment*
Guest Speaker: Dean Fraga, Biology
- Oct 25, 2006** Student Learning Goals
Guest Speakers:
Henry Kreuzman, Philosophy
Lee McBride, Philosophy
John Rudisill, Philosophy
Elizabeth Schiltz, Philosophy
- Nov 29, 2006** Methods of Assessment: Direct Methods
Guest Speakers:
John Gabriele, Spanish
Pam Pierce, Mathematics
Sarah Schmidtke, Chemistry
- Jan 17, 2007** Methods of Assessment: Indirect Methods
Guest Speaker:
Edith Foster, Classical Studies
Matthew McGowan, Classical Studies
Robert Varga, Geology
- Feb 21, 2007** Feedback Mechanism
Guest Speaker: Megan Wereley, Education
- Apr 11, 2007** Integrated Assessment Plan
Guest Speaker: John Neuhoff, Psychology

For further information contact :
John Neuhoff, Assessment Committee Chair

Meetings & Events

- Sep 5-7, 2006** Barbara Walvoord Campus Visit
- Oct 18, 2006** Assessment Committee (AC) meeting with Education Policy Committee
- Oct 27, 2006** AC meeting with Board of Trustees of The College of Wooster
- Dec 11, 2006** AC Subcommittee meeting with Q-faculty

Department and Program Assessment Plans

- Nov 17, 2006** Student Learning Goals due to VPAA
- Dec 8, 2006** AC Feedback due to Departments/Programs
- Jan 19, 2007** Methods of Assessment due to VPAA
- Feb 9, 2007** AC Feedback due to Departments/Programs
- Mar 2, 2007** Feedback Mechanism due to VPAA
- Mar 23, 2007** AC Feedback due to Departments/Programs
- Apr 20, 2007** Integrated Assessment Plan due to VPAA

Conferences & Training Programs

- Oct 29-31, 2006** National Assessment Institute, Indianapolis
- Jan 11-12, 2007** HEDS Winter Forum, Santa Fe, NM
- Feb 7-9, 2007** HLC Assessment Workshop, Lisle, IL

Next AM Issue

- ▶ Assessing Creativity and Critical Thinking in the Liberal Arts, A Teagle Foundation – funded project of the Five Colleges of Ohio.
- ▶ Student Corner in Assessment
- ▶ Highlights of the 2006 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)