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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.

www.wooster.edu/assessment

Inside AM

Anchoring educational excellence with access, affordability, and accountability is the main theme of *College Learning for the New Global Economy*. Critical and creative thinking are among the intellectual skills outcomes identified in the LEAP report published by the AAC&U. Read about the report and a project assessing critical thinking and creativity by the Five Colleges of Ohio in this *AM* issue.

A Wooster education makes a difference! Wooster seniors respond differently from their peers on key critical thinking and other indicators on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). This issue of *AM* highlights national findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in 2006 and selected College of Wooster NSSE findings from 2005.

AM for Students will become a regular column that will focus on student education, involvement, and engagement in assessment. This *AM* issue features student involvement in assessment in the Classical Studies Department.

Assessment Briefs and the Assessment Calendar are a way to keep informed about the work of the Assessment Committee and other assessment matters.

Assessing Critical Thinking in the Liberal Arts

Are your students learning to think more critically? How do you know? These are the fundamental questions being deliberated by a group of faculty from the Five Colleges of Ohio. The group has been meeting since last fall after it was announced that the Five Colleges of Ohio were awarded a grant from the Teagle Foundation for a consortial project to study *Creativity and Critical Thinking: Assessing the Foundations of a Liberal Arts Education*. Prior to this award, the group had received a planning grant from the Teagle Foundation.

With faculty from a variety of disciplines, two working groups were established, one on critical thinking and the other on creativity. Lori Bettison-Varga, Associate Dean for Research and Grants at The College of Wooster, is directing the project,

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with Sarah Murnen, Professor of Psychology at Kenyon College, leading the critical thinking working group, and Nancy Grace, Professor of English at The College of Wooster, leading the creativity working group. This *AM* highlights the critical thinking aspect of the study, and the next edition will focus on creativity.

The critical thinking working group began its study reading Halpern's *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*, Nelson's *Cultivating Judgment: A Sourcebook for Teaching Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum*, Walvoord's *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment*, and a report from the Delphi Project, a group of specialists on the subject of critical thinking who were convened by the American Philosophical Association. The critical thinking working group discussed what it means to think critically across the disciplines, and they used a variety of assignments and rubrics to provoke and evaluate critical thinking. Brainstorming and generating a list of skills associated with critical thinking helped the group in the development of their rubrics.

One issue that the group considered recurrently was whether a single rubric could be developed and applied across disciplines and assignments or whether multiple rubrics would have to be developed. Barbara Walvoord, who attended the initial meeting of both working groups, discussed this issue with the groups. She noted that it was unlikely that the groups would produce a universal rubric that could be applied across disciplines or assignments. Ultimately, the group produced and refined several rubrics that assess individual assignments and rubrics that assess broader aspects of the curriculum, such as senior projects, a writing program, and the learning goals of the major. Therefore, the rubrics can be applied to general education, program, and course assessment.

The focus of the working groups has not only been on the development and application of the rubrics, but also on the process of development. As they document and reflect on the process, faculty members have commented that the rubrics helped in the design of a more effective assignment or course, motivated

curricular change, and illuminated the problem-solving process. One faculty member noted that the rubrics of the other faculty helped him in designing a more effective rubric to assess critical thinking.

The study will also pilot surveys on perceptions of critical thinking and creativity of Denison University, Kenyon College, Ohio Wesleyan University, and The College of Wooster faculty and students. Following the pilot surveys, a longitudinal study of students' perceptions of critical thinking and creativity will be conducted over a four-year period beginning in the 2007-08 academic year. A website for the critical thinking and creativity assessment project is currently under development; assignments, rubrics, process descriptions, and related links will be posted.

LEAP Report

In January 2007, the Association of American Colleges and Universities published *College Learning for the New Global Century* by the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise (LEAP). The AAC&U launched LEAP in 2005 as a decade-long initiative and national effort to readjust college learning to meet the needs of the new global century. The report describes the fundamental aims, learning outcomes, and guiding principles of a college education in the twenty-first century.

The four primary learning outcomes are the following:

1. knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world,
2. intellectual and practical skills,
3. personal and social responsibility, and
4. integrative learning.

Among the list of intellectual and practical skills is critical and creative thinking, as well as inquiry and analysis, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, and teamwork and problem solving. Personal and social responsibility includes local and global civic knowledge and engagement, intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning. These outcomes are described as being closely aligned with the challenges of a complex

and volatile world, and as a framework to guide students' progress from school through college.

The report stresses that higher education policy discussions have focused on the expansion of access, the reduction of costs, and accountability for student achievement. What college students need to know and be able to do is of equally important public and policy consideration. Access, affordability, and accountability must be anchored by educational excellence. The LEAP report is available online at www.aacu.org.

2006 NSSE Highlights

The National Survey of Student Engagement recently released its 2006 annual report, based on information obtained from about 260,000 randomly selected first-year and senior students from 523 four-year colleges and universities. The NSSE study is an indirect method of measuring how well students are learning and what they put into and get out of their undergraduate experience. Selected findings from the 2006 report are:

- Both first-year and senior students spend on average about 13-14 hours per week preparing for class, far less than what faculty members say is necessary to do well in their classes.
- Students studied fewer hours in their first year than they expected when they started college.
- Student engagement is positively related to grades and to persistence between the first and second year of college.
- First-year students at liberal arts colleges more often participate in class discussions and view their faculty more positively than students at other institutions.

The full 2006 report can be viewed at:

http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2006_Annual_Report/docs/NSSE_2006_Annual_Report.pdf.

Wooster Makes a Difference!

The College of Wooster did not participate in the 2006 NSSE study, but did take part in the 2005 NSSE. Findings show that most responses by Wooster first-year students were not significantly different from first-

years at other liberal arts colleges. Exceptions included speaking clearly and effectively, analyzing quantitative problems, and working effectively with others, in which Wooster first-year students responded significantly lower than some of the comparative college groups.

In contrast with the findings for first-year students, responses to the following questions by Wooster seniors were higher and significantly different from seniors at other liberal arts colleges:

- Worked on a project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources.
- Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class.
- Had coursework that emphasized “synthesizing” and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships.
- Did an independent study/self-designed major.
- Had a culminating senior experience.
- The College’s experience contributed to your knowledge, skills and personal development in:
 - writing clearly and effectively,
 - thinking critically and analytically, and
 - learning effectively on your own.

AM for Students

Students are becoming increasingly involved in the assessment of their learning on campus. They have provided feedback on departmental student learning goals, mission statements, and methods of assessment; have helped to design measurements; and have been involved in measurement testing. This AM edition highlights student engagement in the assessment processes of the Classical Studies Department.

Classical Studies Department

The Classical Studies Department began development of an Independent Study (IS) rubric to assess the effectiveness of its major in achieving the department's student learning goals in the spring of 2006. In late spring, after seniors in the department had completed their IS and all of the requirements for their major, the faculty asked them to review and comment on the

rubric. The initial feedback from students was very helpful. Students commented on the substance and the tone of the rubric. While they thought most of the formulations were acceptable, they found some parts of the rubric less relevant to their own experience with the IS thesis. Students also objected to language they found too supervisory of their projects. The rubric was revised during the summer of 2006. It now includes a broader conception of the IS project and incorporates clearer language for assessing student responses to guidance suggestions and departmental standards.

Seniors during the 2006-07 academic year were given the rubric and understand that their senior IS will be assessed with the rubric, which will be the first time it has been used. The rubric is also included in the department's Independent Study Handbook. Students have provided some feedback on the rubric during the year. The department has found that student familiarity (not to mention faculty familiarity) with the IS assessment rubric has made it possible for students to develop a more concrete idea of the expectations for their culminating oral defense. Upon completion of their IS, the department plans to gather additional feedback from its senior students. With this additional student feedback and faculty feedback from its initial use, the department will continue to review the rubric.

Assessment Briefs

Department/Program Assessment Plans

Student learning goals are the first component of department and program assessment plans. Last fall, all departments and programs submitted student learning goals to Iain Crawford, Vice President of Academic Affairs. John Neuhoff, Assessment Committee (AC) Chair, provided the committee's feedback to chairs. The second component of the plan involves developing methods of assessment and relating them to learning goals. All departments with majors and most programs submitted direct and indirect measures related to goals, and subsequently received feedback from the AC.

The final component of assessment plans is the feedback mechanism. The due date has been revised to

March 28th with AC feedback due April 18th. The requested material has also been revised. The Assessment Guidelines on the website have the revised date and description of submission material.

Assessment Exemplars

Faculty from the Biology, Education, Geology, Philosophy, and Spanish Departments have volunteered to speak at the Assessment Matters lunch series and to assist with other ongoing assessment activities of the College. Dean Fraga, Chair of the Biology Department; Henry Kreuzman, Lee McBride, John Rudisill, and Elizabeth Schiltz of the Philosophy Department; and John Gabriele, Chair of the Spanish Department, participated in the Fall Assessment Matters luncheon series that focused on the College's *Guidelines for Assessment*, student learning goals, and direct measures of assessment. Other guest speakers were Pam Pierce from the Math and Computer Science Department and Sarah Schmidtke from the Chemistry Department who discussed their department's Independent Study rubrics.

Assessment Matters Lunch Series

The January Assessment Matters (AM) Brown Bag Lunch focused on indirect methods of assessment with Edith Foster and Matthew McGowan of the Classical Studies Department discussing their senior exit survey. The February AM lunch featured JaQuan Bryant and Abigail Kline, student representatives on the Assessment Committee, leading a discussion on student involvement in assessment. Faculty from several departments contributed to this discussion describing the different approaches and timing of involving students in the assessment process.

The AM lunch series will conclude with a discussion on assessment data issues with Anne Gates and Megan Wereley of the Education Department and Nancy Grace of the English Department discussing inter-rater reliability in the use of rubrics. This topic may interest departments and programs that have developed rubrics as direct measures of their student learning goals. John Neuhoff will also discuss issues associated with data collection and analysis. The final lunch is April 11 in 238 Kauke Hall at noon.

Assessment Committee News

The Assessment Committee (AC), chaired by John Neuhoff, Assistant Professor of Psychology, meets weekly during Spring semester at 3:00 on Fridays in Galpin Board Room. Minutes and Annual Reports of the Committee are posted on the Assessment website.

New Committee Members

Committee members welcome three new members: two student representatives, JaQuan Bryant and Abigail Kline; and a faculty member, Richard Lehtinen. Mr. Bryant and Ms. Kline joined the Committee at the end of the Fall Semester. Mr. Bryant is a junior from San Leandro, California, who is majoring in Africana Studies and minoring in Education. He is President in the Black Students' Association, and is the Student Resident Director for program houses. Mr. Bryant sings in the College's gospel choir, and is a student hearing member for judicial board.

Ms. Kline is also a junior, from Willard, Ohio, who is majoring in philosophy. She is a member of the Moot Court National Team that advanced to the national tournament this January, where she won all-American honors by finishing sixth among individual Orators. She is also a captain of the Wooster cheerleading team and a ballet accompanist.

Joining the Committee this spring is Richard Lehtinen, Assistant Professor of Biology. Dr. Lehtinen is an expert in ecology, evolution and conservation biology with a special interest in tropical biology and amphibians. He is a member of a number of scholarly societies including: the Society for the Study of Evolution, the Ecological Society of America and the Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles.

Higher Learning Commission Assessment Workshop

Six members from the Assessment Committee, Thomas Wood, John Neuhoff, William Macauley, Elys Kettling Law, Simon Gray, and Theresa Ford, attended the February Assessment Workshop of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) in Lisle, IL. Given the reception of Wooster's presentation at the Workshop and discussions with Workshop coordinators and mentors and representatives from other colleges, the group felt

confident that Wooster has made significant progress in assessment. Simon Gray and John Neuhoff presented "Developing Departmental Assessment Plans," which was well attended with requests for additional handouts. Wooster was invited by the HLC to give this informal presentation, described as a "good practice," after the Workshop's lead mentor read the group's assessment status report, a pre-workshop assignment that the group completed. A summary report is posted on the website.

Quantitative Reasoning, Q-Assessment

Nancy Grace and Simon Gray hosted a meeting with the Q-faculty to obtain feedback on the pilot study assessing the quantitative reasoning requirement that was conducted last spring. Q-faculty members are those who teach courses designated as having a substantial element of quantitative reasoning (q) in *A Wooster Education*. Discussion centered on a broad range of topics resulting in several recommendations that will be presented to the Educational Policy and Assessment Committees. These include redoing the pilot study, raising the minimum passing grade for q-courses, having q-faculty prepare a document that explains the parameters of the learning goals for q-courses, collecting data from the registrar related to the q-requirement, identifying information requirements for syllabi of q-courses, and clarifying q-course goals.

Assessment @ Wooster Blog

Read the latest blogs on assessment through Wooster's newest blog. Link to it from the assessment website or from <http://assessment.blogs.wooster.edu/> directly.

Assessment Committee Members, Spring 2007
John Neuhoff, Chair, Psychology

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

Assessment Calendar

Assessment Matters Brown Bag Lunch Series Spring Semester, 238 Kauke Hall

- Jan 17, 2007** Methods of Assessment: Indirect Methods
Guest Speakers:
Edith Foster, Classical Studies
Matthew McGowan, Classical Studies
- Feb 21, 2007** Progress Report on Faculty and Student
Involvement in Assessment
Faculty Guest Speakers:
Simon Gray, Computer Science
John Neuhoff, Psychology
Student Guest Speakers:
JaQuan Bryant, Africana Studies and
Education
Abigail Kline, Philosophy
- Apr 11, 2007** Assessment Data Issues
Guest Speakers:
Anne Gates, Education
Nancy Grace, English
John Neuhoff, Psychology
Megan Wereley, Education
- For further information contact :
John Neuhoff, Assessment Committee Chair

Department and Program Assessment Plans Revised February, 2007

- Feb 2, 2007** Methods of Assessment due to VPAA
- Mar 2, 2007** AC Feedback due to Departments/Programs
- Mar 28, 2007** Feedback Mechanism due to VPAA
- Apr 18, 2007** AC Feedback due to Departments/Programs
- Apr 27, 2007** Integrated Assessment Plan due to VPAA

Meetings & Events

Five Colleges of Ohio Teagle Project

- Jan 12, 2007** Kenyon College, Gambier OH
With Steven Tepper, Vanderbilt University
- Feb 24, 2007** The College of Wooster, Wooster, OH
With Steven Tepper, Vanderbilt University
and Joseph Trimmer, Ball State University
- Mar 12, 2007** Tufts University, Medford, MA
Visit with Robert J. Sternberg
- April 5, 2007** Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry,
Ball State University, Muncie, IN
Visit with Joseph Trimmer

Conferences & Training Programs

- Jan 8-10, 2007** Creativity or Conformity?
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, Wales
- Jan 11-12, 2007** HEDS Winter Forum, Santa Fe, NM
- Feb 7-9, 2007** HLC Assessment Workshop, Lisle, IL
- Apr 20-24, 2007** HLC Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL

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.

Next *AM* Issue

- ▶ Assessing Creativity in the Liberal Arts, A Teagle Foundation-funded project of the Five Colleges of Ohio
- ▶ Excerpts from Professor Nancy Grace's interview with Steven Tepper, Associate Director of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy