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[www.wooster.edu/assessment](http://www.wooster.edu/assessment)

## *Inside AM*

Essential to Wooster students' success in Independent Study and other undergraduate research experiences are information literacy skills. The **feature article** of the Summer *AM* issue reports on findings from a collaborative study of liberal arts institutions on research skills of incoming first-year students.

**Inside AM**, read about a proposal that favors a free market system of accreditation in a recent policy paper by ACTA, whose president was recently appointed by the Bush administration to serve on the panel that reviews accreditors.

Portfolios are one alternative to traditional summative testing of student learning. This issue, which provides a brief overview of learning portfolios, will be the first in a **multi-part series** on student learning portfolios.

Your assessment matters! **Assessment Briefs** provides one example of how you can provide input to benefit a program, and another of how you can benefit from the input of others.

## *Research Skills of First-Year Students at Liberal Arts Colleges*

In the fall of 2006, the College of Wooster was among several liberal arts colleges participating in a collaborative project spearheaded by Carleton College designed to assess the information literacy of incoming first-year students. The project involved administering a web-based survey. A major finding of the survey across participating institutions was a disconnect between what first-year students perceive they know and what they actually know about documenting and using sources. For example,

- 77 percent think it is easy to know when to document a source, but ...
  - 47 percent did not recognize the correct definition of a citation, and
  - 44 percent could not determine when a citation is not required.
- 68 percent think it is easy to know how to document a source, but ...
  - 76 percent could not differentiate between a journal article from a book or book chapter, and
  - 66 percent could not identify the distinctive characteristics of an academic journal.

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- 88 percent think it is very easy or somewhat easy to determine whether a source is appropriate for an academic research project, but ...
  - 46 percent did not recognize a personal web page as a less appropriate source than a university press book, encyclopedia, or refereed journal article, and
  - 78 percent thought that Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News could be scholarly sources.

The survey, First Year Information Literacy in Liberal Arts Assessment (FYILLAA), was initially piloted in 2005 with eight liberal arts colleges, and in 2006 received funding from the National Institute for Technology and Liberal Education (NITLE) to expand the number of participating institutions in its second year. The FYILLAA survey can be used as a pre-test and post-test to measure the information literacy of incoming students before they have had any college research or library instruction. The tool is a direct and an indirect measure with questions about what students think they know (indirect measure) and questions testing them on their knowledge (direct measure).

The survey was administered to first-year liberal arts students to assess baseline skills, experiences, preferences, beliefs, and attitudes regarding research. Participating institutions receive data about their students, along with comprehensive and comparative data. Wooster invited all Fall 2006 First Year Seminar students to take the survey, and while Wooster's participation rate was lower than that achieved by the majority of the 2006 FYILLAA institutions, its data closely mirrored the typical findings.

The next step in the project is for Wooster to analyze its local FYILLAA survey data more closely to document local benchmarks for these specific skill sets, to determine the most appropriate and timely instructional interventions needed, and to discover how best to use the findings to improve information literacy among its students engaging in research at all levels of the

curriculum. Wooster also has the option of surveying the first-year students who completed the survey later in their undergraduate years to assess improvement in student learning of these key research skills.

For more information on the project, check out the following website at Carleton College:  
<http://apps.carleton.edu/campus/library/about/infolit/fyillaa/>.

## *ACTA Proposes a Free Market in Accreditation*

The recent policy paper of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) clearly states its premise in its title, *Why Accreditation Doesn't Work and What Policymakers Can Do About It*. Published in July 2007, the paper is a continuation of its 2002 study, *Can College Accreditation Live Up to Its Promise?* At that time, ACTA argued that "accreditation did not ensure quality, was not protecting the curriculum from serious degradation, and was giving students, parents, and public decision-makers almost no useful information about institutions of higher education." The foreword to the 2007 paper, by Anne D. Neal, President of ACTA, concludes that "things have only become worse." [Ms. Neal is one of the Bush Administration's recent appointments to the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI), the panel that reviews accrediting agencies.]

The paper recommends that the link between federal student aid and accreditation be broken. Under the current system, only "accredited" colleges and universities receive federal financial student aid. Rather than limiting federal student aid to accredited higher education institutions, ACTA recommends that the government should ban federal student aid to colleges and universities guilty of educational fraud, much like the government does with its Food Stamp Program. With this recommendation as well as others that would open up a free market in accreditation and remove legislative language empowering accreditors, ACTA is proposing a complete dismantling of the current accreditation system. To read the report and the corresponding action agenda, click on the following link: <http://www.goacta.org/publications/reports.html>.

## Student Learning Portfolios

One assessment alternative to traditional summative testing of student learning is the portfolio. Portfolios are appealing to faculty who want a more comprehensive way to assess student learning and development over time, to have students actively participate in the assessment process, and to develop students' reflective thinking skills. Portfolios enable faculty to see not only *what* students are learning but *how* they are learning.

Zubizarreta (2004) offers the following definition of a student portfolio,

The learning portfolio is a flexible, evidence-based tool that engages students in a process of continuous reflection and collaborative analysis of learning. As written text, electronic display, or other creative project, the portfolio captures the scope, richness, and relevance of students' learning. The portfolio focuses on purposefully and collaboratively selected reflections and evidence for both improvement and assessment of students' learning (p.16).

Why use portfolios? Portfolios provide compelling evidence of what a student has learned. It collects in one place different kinds of learning and skills. It enables faculty to examine student learning holistically. It demonstrates how a student has grown as a learner. The portfolio helps faculty refine what and how they teach. It integrates teaching, learning and assessment. It also encourages student reflection, which develops skills in synthesis and metacognition.

This brief summary of why faculty and students may wish to implement student learning portfolios is the first in a multi-part series on portfolios. Future issues will address practical issues, development, use, and scoring.

### References

- Banta, T.W. (2003). Introduction: Why Portfolios? In T. W. Banta (Ed.) *Portfolio Assessment: Uses, Cases, Scoring, and Impact* (pp. 1-6). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Suskie, L. (2004). *Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide*. Bolton, MA: Anker.
- Zubizarreta, J. (2004). *The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning*. Bolton, MA: Anker.

## Assessment Briefs

### The College of Wooster Art Museum

The next time you attend a College of Wooster Art Museum (COWAM) event or exhibit, take a minute to complete the visitor survey! Visitors may select a paper survey at the museum or an online version by clicking "online visitor survey" at COWAM's website: <http://artmuseum.wooster.edu/survey.html>. Visitors are asked to rate their overall experience, to rate the value of the visit as an art experience, and to describe their reaction to the visit as well as other questions. Director and Curator, Kathleen McManus Zurko reads the evaluations regularly to assess the value of COWAM's programs and services.

### Advising on Off-Campus Study?

With scores of international and domestic off-campus study programs endorsed by The College of Wooster, choosing an off-campus program or advising students in their choice can be a daunting task. Having access to participant feedback in a program would inform the decision-making of the student considering the program as well as faculty members who are advising students in this critical choice. Thanks to Jenifer Cushman, former Director of the International Program Office (IPO), this feedback is now available at your fingertips.

One of the program requirements of off-campus study is for students to fill out an evaluation form of the program and their experience upon their return to campus. These forms are posted by program on the IPO's website, <http://www.wooster.edu/ipo/>. Simply click on the password-protected "Program Evaluation" and then click on a specific program. If a Wooster student has participated in the program, his or her evaluation will be posted, and may be viewed by anyone with a College of Wooster email address. Faculty members are encouraged to read the evaluations as an advising tool for their students, and students are encouraged to read them to learn more about a specific program from the experiences of their peers.

## Assessment Committee

The Assessment Committee (AC), chaired by John Neuhoff, Director of Research and Grants and Associate Professor of Psychology, will meet biweekly during Fall semester at 3:00 p.m. on Wednesdays in Galpin Board Room. Minutes and Annual Reports of the Committee are posted on the Assessment website.

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Assessment Committee Members, Fall 2007

John Neuhoff, Chair, Research & Grants and Psychology

Iain Crawford, VPAA

Simon Gray, Computer Science

Elys Kettling Law, Library

William Macauley, English

Student representative(s) TBA

Theresa Ford, Assessment

Henry Kreuzman, Philosophy

Richard Lehtinen, Biology

Thomas Wood, Music

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## Departments and Programs

All academic departments and interdisciplinary programs will be collecting assessment data during the 2007-08 year and submitting their first annual assessment report. Last year exemplar departments in assessment – Biology, Education, Geology, Philosophy, and Spanish – collected data and submitted reports. Nearly one-third of all departments and programs collected assessment data last year, one year ahead of schedule. One of the first charges of the Assessment Committee will be to establish an assessment reporting process and to communicate this process with departments and programs.

## Mindset List for the Class of 2011!

Beloit College in Wisconsin has released the tenth annual Mindset List for the Class of 2011. The 70 items capture the cultural touchstones that have shaped the lives of today's first-year students, most of them born in 1989. The list is the creation of Tom McBride, Keefer Professor of the Humanities, and Ron Nief, Public Affairs Director at Beloit. For the Class of 2011, Pete Rose has never been in baseball, Abbie Hoffman has always been dead, Johnny Carson has never been live on TV, and Nelson Mandela has always been free. The link to Beloit's Mindset List is:

<http://www.beloit.edu/~pubaff/mindset/2011.php>.

## Assessment Calendar

### Meetings & Events

	<b>Five Colleges of Ohio Teagle Project</b> <i>Teagle Project &amp; Orientation Workshops</i>
<b>Aug 14, 2007</b>	Kenyon College, Gambier, OH
<b>Aug 16, 2007</b>	The College of Wooster, Wooster, OH
<b>Sep 14, 2007</b>	Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH
<b>Sep 28, 2007</b>	Kenyon College, Gambier, OH
	<b>NCA Higher Learning Commission</b>
<b>Oct 29-30, 2007</b>	Site Visit The College of Wooster, Wooster, OH

## 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 of 400 words or less to Sarah Sidor ([ssidor@wooster.edu](mailto:ssidor@wooster.edu)).

## Acknowledgments

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