

Contents

- 1 Chairs Report on Assessment
- 6 Creative and Critical Thinking Pilot Survey Findings
- 7 Student Learning Portfolios
- 7 Assessment Briefs
 - Assessment Committee
 - Departments and Programs
 - Annual Assessment Report Template
 - HLC Visit
- 8 Assessment Calendar

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www.wooster.edu/assessment

Inside AM

College of Wooster **Chairs** of academic departments and programs met and discussed departmental experiences of implementing assessment plans last year. As a result of their assessment findings, departments are making changes to their curricula and pedagogy and refining assessment measures and objectives. The feature article in this issue of *AM* summarizes their discussion.

Students are more likely than faculty to distinguish between words associated with creative thinking and words associated with critical thinking. Selected findings from the Faculty and Student Pilot **Surveys on Creative and Critical Thinking** of the Five Colleges of Ohio project funded by the Teagle Foundation are reported in this *AM* issue.

The **content of portfolios** is the focus of Part II in a multi-part series on student learning portfolios in this issue of *AM*.

The College's new **annual assessment report template** is available! This issue of *AM* describes where you can find it and when annual assessment reports are due.

Chairs Report on Assessment

On October 4, 2007, Chairs or Assessment Coordinators from nearly all academic departments and interdisciplinary programs of The College of Wooster met at The Wooster Inn to share experiences in implementing departmental assessment plans from last year. The purpose of the meeting was to provide a broad overview of different types of experiences, those that were successful and those that were less so, from a range of departments and programs across the four divisions, and to provide an opportunity for questions and comments on these experiences. Successes and failures in one department will not necessarily translate into the same for another, but this type of discussion may generate ideas for departments and programs in the way they implement their assessment plans and may lead to future exchanges on assessment, teaching and learning between and among departments.

continued on page 2

Last year exemplar departments in assessment, Biology, Education, Geology, Philosophy and Spanish, volunteered to implement their assessment plans a year ahead of other departments and programs. They collected data and wrote assessment reports that included a summary of the data analysis, findings from the data, changes that resulted from the assessment findings, and plans for future assessment. Although all other departments and programs were expected to implement plans during the 2007-08 academic year, half of all departments and programs implemented assessment plans last year and collected data, which led to a fruitful discussion of varied experiences.

Chairs discussed

- changes in pedagogy or the curriculum resulting from the assessment planning process or from implementing the assessment plan,
- participation rates, anonymity, and ethical concerns related to senior exit surveys,
- narrowing the focus (or not) of assessment plans and data collection,
- use of technology in implementing assessment plans,
- implementation of a standardized test, and
- unexpected results in piloting a direct measure.

Following Vice President of Academic Affairs Iain Crawford's introductory remarks, John Neuhoff, Chair of the Assessment Committee, differentiated between program goals and student learning goals. He remarked that although departments probably wish to have both types of goals, the Assessment Committee's mission is related to student learning goals. Examples of student learning goals and goals not directly related to student learning (program goals) can be found in the Guidelines for Assessment on the assessment website at www.wooster.edu/assessment/guidelines.pdf.

Changes in Pedagogy or the Curriculum

Several Chairs discussed action items affecting departmental curricula resulting from findings from their analyses of assessment data or from the process of

developing assessment plans. The Theatre and Dance Department is hoping to alter the culture of its department as students move from one course to another. The Geology Department has a strategy to help students improve their ability to write abstracts. The Spanish Department has modified course content as it aligned its course goals with its learning goals for its majors.

As a result of developing student learning goals for courses taught by multiple faculty and those taught by individual faculty members and relating these goals to the departmental student learning goals, changes in course content were made and a Majors' Handbook was developed in the *Spanish* Department. John Gabriele added that the Handbook was written in such a way that it would not have to be revised unless the student learning goals were revised. You can link to the Majors' Handbook from the assessment website at www.wooster.edu/assessment/REPORTSANDPLANS.html. Dean Fraga, Chair of the Biology Department, commented that like the Spanish Department, the Biology Department also made fortuitous discoveries about its courses when Biology developed its goals.

Shirley Huston-Findley discussed changes that the *Theatre and Dance* Department have implemented as a result of analyzing the data collected from its direct and indirect measures. Faculty members found that students weren't making the connection between what they had learned in Junior Independent Study (I.S.) and the writing and critical thinking processes in Senior I.S. Subsequently the department decided to have students create a portfolio of Junior I.S. papers that they would take to their senior advisors, who could identify the progress of individual students and encourage them to mimic this process. Another change was to schedule due dates during the Senior I.S. process so that students continue to make progress throughout the year. By enacting these changes, the Department of Theatre and Dance hopes to change the culture of the department as students move from one class to another. The College's August 2007 progress report on assessment to the

Higher Learning Commission describes the action items taken by the Theatre and Dance Department (p. 42). The link to the report can be found on the assessment website at www.wooster.edu/assessment/HLC.html.

Although one of the objectives of the Theatre and Dance Department's "communication and reflection" goal is to "effectively deliver oral presentations to a class or group," the Department acknowledged that it did not give students much opportunity to make oral presentations within their course of study as a major in the department. The Department has roundtable discussions, but no formal presentations until Senior I.S. This year, prior to Senior I.S., the Department will require students to give formal presentations in Lean Lecture Hall with a question and answer period after the presentation, thus giving students an oral presentation opportunity prior to their Senior I.S.

At the two-hour, year-end assessment meeting of the *Geology* Department, Robert Varga assigned each departmental faculty member to analyze and summarize the data from one of the department's three measurements: 1) writing rubric, 2) oral presentation rubrics for Junior I.S. and Senior I.S., and 3) the senior exit survey. Students were given the writing rubric, which they found useful in examining early drafts of their papers, and improved in their citation of sources. One of the resulting findings was that students did not know how to write abstracts. As an action item related to this finding, the Department may include an in-class writing of an abstract from a professional paper in which the abstract has been removed, which had been implemented with some success formerly in Junior I.S. A link to the Geology Department's annual report, measures, and departmental website can be found at www.wooster.edu/assessment/REPORTSANDPLANS.html on the assessment website.

Implementing Senior Exit Surveys

Much of the Chairs' discussion focused on issues surrounding the implementation of senior exit surveys, including participation rates, ethical concerns, technology, and timing. Henry Kreuzman, Chair of the Philosophy Department, brought up the issue of ethics

and its significance at a liberal arts college in considering how to encourage students to participate in departmental surveys and in guaranteeing anonymity. John Neuhoff observed that ethics may be a good topic to discuss in an *Assessment Matters* forum.

Kent Kille and Matthew Krain spoke about the success of the *Political Science* Department in implementing its senior exit survey. The Department, which had 22 majors last year and double that this year, had a 100 percent participation rate in its senior exit survey. The majors convened at a mandatory departmental pizza luncheon, and were told that their Independent Study grades would not be released until after the lunch meeting. Students were asked to complete the survey, which all did, and many stayed later to provide additional informal conversational feedback on the department, to which faculty members were receptive and open. They noted that the department has a culture of mandatory participation built into it, which other departments may not have. Claudia Thompson, Chair of the Psychology Department, added that participation is linked to building expectations. Political Science faculty members found both the responses to the written surveys and the spontaneous oral feedback valuable. The department's senior exit survey can be viewed at www.wooster.edu/assessment/REPORTSANDPLANS.html.

Shirley Huston-Findley discussed her department's plans to change its process of collecting senior exit surveys after struggling to get majors to complete the survey last year. The Theatre and Dance Department had a 60 percent response rate, with six out of ten seniors completing the survey. This year the process will involve students' turning completed surveys into the department's administrative coordinator. Upon receipt of the survey, the administrative coordinator will give each student an envelope with their Independent Study grade and a written explanation of the grade. Otherwise, if a student chooses not to complete and turn in a senior exit survey, he or she will have to wait to receive the I.S. grade from the Registrar's Office. John Neuhoff commented that this seemed to be a feasible solution to the ethical dilemmas

of guaranteeing anonymity to students and withholding grades from students.

The Geology Department administered an online survey to its seniors. The survey responses went directly to Peter James, Director of Web Services/Public Information, who could tell Robert Varga daily how many students were completing the survey. The Department continually reminded students to complete the survey until nearly all seniors participated. Eleven out of 12 seniors completed the survey for a 92 percent response rate. The survey response data are emailed to the Chair without any identifying information in an excel spreadsheet, which bypasses the data input required of paper surveys. William Morgan added that the *Biochemistry and Molecular Biology* Program plans to use Woodle for its survey in the future, which also captures the data electronically and provides summary statistics on survey responses. Claudia Thompson warned about the timing of giving surveys when students are in a “euphoric” state just after completing their Independent Studies, which may skew the responses.

Employing Direct Measures

A variety of direct measures were described and discussed by Chairs, including rubrics to assess student learning objectives from electronic portfolios and Independent Study presentations and theses, locally or externally developed standardized tests, and test questions during the I.S. oral examination.

Anne Nurse found it ironic that the *Sociology and Anthropology* Department, which teaches evaluation research, had a validity problem with one of its direct measures and has decided to discontinue its use. At the end of each student’s I.S. oral examination, faculty members asked two questions about methodology in which students had to describe methods that they may or may not have used in their Independent Studies. The first three students were unable to answer the questions well, but then students began responding remarkably well. It became clear to the faculty that it was not a measure of the students’ ability to understand methodology but rather a measure of their ability to

network socially. Dean Fraga and Bill Morgan remarked that they had experienced a similar problem in the Biology Department and wondered whether probing the methodological questions in a more subtle way would eliminate the social networking.

Last year the *Psychology* Department piloted a standardized test, the ETS field test in Psychology. Claudia Thompson noted that it was fairly expensive to administer online, but that the department obtained funding from the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The department had 50 majors last year, and originally told majors that receipt of their I.S. grades would be linked to their participation in the online field test. Prior to giving the test, they decided not to link it to receipt of I.S. grades. As a result 24 percent of seniors took the exam. Students can take up to two hours to complete the exam, but most completed it in approximately one hour. They receive their scores instantaneously upon completion of the exam.

Although only 12 out of 50 students took the exam, students with a range of academic achievement participated. Results indicated that 83 percent of The College of Wooster Psychology students did better than the national median. The Chair noted that the next year that the ETS field test is administered the department will require students to take the exam. She also commented that the department would not administer the test every year, and that it will develop its own test for the years in which it is not administered. Questions for the Psychology Department by other Chairs related to students’ reactions to making the test mandatory and departmental satisfaction with test questions and with the outcome of having 83 percent of students perform above the national median.

Another department giving a standardized test is the *Biology* Department, which has used Woodle to develop a pre- and post-test given three times to students in the Biology Department. Students take the exam at the beginning and end of the introductory class and at the end of their senior year. William Morgan noted that students participate and take it seriously at the beginning of the introductory Biology class and at

the end of senior year, but that students taking it at the end of the introductory class are generally less serious about taking it. The test was developed with multiple choice questions from a variety of test banks. Anne Nurse asked about pre-test sensitivity, and he explained that the test questions are likely to change from pre- and post-testing because the questions are randomly selected from the department's resulting test bank, which contains a set of questions related to one of thirty different goals and concepts. Each test has approximately 40 questions. William Morgan commented that implementing the test was not as straightforward on Woodle as they originally thought it would be, but that Jon Breitenbucher was very helpful in the Woodle development process.

Alison Schmidt discussed the purpose, technology used, and method to measure the *Education* Department's evolving e-portfolio. One of the program goals of the Education Department is to help students make connections between the classes in their majors and teaching and classes in education. One of the ways the department began to do this several years ago was to create a "paper" portfolio that included artifacts connecting to a national standard. Schmidt noted that this was very cumbersome, and student interest was uneven, being well received but misunderstood by students in one licensure program and not well received by students in another. About five years ago, the department created an e-portfolio with the aid of Information Technology personnel and Dreamweaver software, and this year the Department is unveiling its next generation e-portfolio, developed with CMS software and Information Technology personnel.

Currently the Education Department assesses the portfolio at three levels, the introductory level, a mid-level, and at the student-teaching level with one rubric. Faculty in the department have been trained in inter-rater reliability, although recently a reliability issue surfaced that indicated the need for further training. Claudia Thompson noted that tracking changes with the same rubric for different assignments with different expectations is like tracking apples and oranges, which she learned on the Writing Advisory Board through its

Writing Program assessment. Iain Crawford noted that assessment is not scholarly research and questioned whether the measurement tool works well enough. Michelle Johnson, Chair of the Communication Department, noted that her department also had an inter-rater reliability issue that it had to overcome.

Two departments will venture in opposite directions as each continues to assess student learning within their departments. Dean Fraga explained that the Biology Department will narrow its focus and reduce its data collection while Henry Kreuzman remarked that the *Philosophy* Department will continue to collect all of the data that it collected last year for the next couple years. Last year the Philosophy Department used a rubric to assess the thesis, a roundtable presentation, the Independent Study process, and the oral examination. The department decided that there were two advantages to using the rubric and continuing to collect similar data. Students have been given the rubric. They like it, focus their attention on what the department wants them to learn, and understand that the rubric is not used for grading. Another advantage the Department sees is that it will be valuable to look at the same data over time.

In order to avoid inundating the department with marginal data, the Biology Department will narrow the focus of its data collection efforts in assessment. For example, Biology has been evaluating student presentations which are going well; as a result, the department will discontinue collecting data. Dean Fraga reported that the Department also found that it was collecting much meaningless data with its rubric to assess Independent Study, and will discontinue collecting those data. Instead, it will focus its data collection efforts on objectives upon which the department can act. Another lesson learned from the department's experience in assessment is that the data needs a narrative context. Departments should be able to answer specific questions like, "what are your students trying to learn?"

The *Communication* Department has made similar discoveries about the benefits of focusing assessment efforts. Michelle Johnson explained that the

department focused its assessment efforts on evaluating writing and speaking skills of their students with both its direct and indirect measure. For their direct measure, the Communication Department used a rubric to assess speaking skills in the I.S. oral presentation and writing skills in the I.S. thesis. Similarly, the senior exit survey focused on students' perceptions of their writing and speaking skills. As one of the larger departments on campus with many majors, it was important for Communication to narrow the focus of its assessment efforts.

Iain Crawford concluded the meeting with a few summary comments. Clearly, there had been much progress in assessment by departments and programs, which was evidenced by the rich discussion on assessment experiences at the meeting. He also reiterated some of the major themes or findings, such as the importance of assessment data having a corresponding narrative that provides a context, the ethical issues surrounding departmental student surveys, and the importance of assessment being a self-reflective and recursive process.

Creative & Critical Thinking Pilot Survey Findings

As one component of The Five Colleges of Ohio project, *Creative and Critical Thinking: Assessing the Foundation of a Liberal Arts Education*, a pilot survey on perceptions of creative and critical thinking was administered in May 2007. Faculty and students from Denison University, Kenyon College, Ohio Wesleyan University, and The College of Wooster participated in one of four surveys. Faculty completed a brief survey on their perceptions of either creative or critical thinking. Students completed a lengthier survey on their perceptions of both creative and critical thinking, but some students received a survey with the creative thinking questions listed first, and others received the critical thinking questions listed first. Several of the survey questions overlapped on both the faculty and student surveys. The pilot survey is part of a multi-year project funded by the Teagle Foundation and directed

by Nancy Grace, Professor of English at The College of Wooster.

At the September 28 Teagle Project meeting at Kenyon College in Gambier, OH, where the working groups on creativity and critical thinking convened, Theresa Ford, Director of Educational Assessment at The College of Wooster, reported on selected findings from the preliminary analyses of survey responses. A summary of the findings include:

- Students are more likely than faculty to distinguish between words associated with critical thinking and words associated with creative thinking.
- Faculty and students are more similar in their responses than dissimilar.
- There is more disagreement between faculty and first-year students than faculty and senior students – mostly in degree of agreement or disagreement, not in direction.
- Self perception of being a creative or critical thinker differs by degree between faculty and students, especially first-year students. Faculty members have a stronger self perception of being critical thinkers, and first-year students have a stronger self perception of being creative.
- There are a few differences in critical thinking survey responses between male and female students, and less between male and female faculty.
- There are many differences in the creative thinking survey responses between tenured and non-tenured faculty.

You may link to the presentation from the home page of the project website at <http://www.wooster.edu/teagle/>, as well as to the *Teagle Pilot Survey Data Book*, which summarizes the demographics and closed-ended responses of the pilot surveys.

Student Learning Portfolios: Part II - Content

The summer issue of *Assessment Matters* explored the question of why to consider a learning portfolio to assess student learning. This issue will briefly address the question of what the contents of a learning portfolio may include. Zubizarreta (2004) provides a generic table of contents of a learning portfolio, which is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but serves as a useful example.

Table of Contents

Philosophy of Learning
Achievements in Learning
Evidence of Learning
Assessment of Learning
Relevance of Learning
Learning Goals
Appendices (p. 17)

The “Properties of Student Academic Portfolios” website page at Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville, lists general characteristics of portfolios that primarily assess students, such as those at Alverno or Evergreen College. Portfolios:

- are required of all students,
- ask students to select (within limits) the work that goes into the portfolio,
- require students to maintain their portfolios over a period of semesters to years,
- may involve an oral defense, and
- almost always require reflective essays that describe the portfolio materials, choices, and development represented therein.

The next issue of *Assessment Matters* will provide models for the learning portfolio.

References

- Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville. Properties of Student Academic Portfolios. Accessed 10/11/2007.
<http://www.siu.edu/~deder/assess/portf.html>
Zubizarreta, J. (2004). *The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning*. Bolton, MA: Anker.

Assessment Briefs

Assessment Committee

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

New Committee Member

Committee members welcome one new member this fall: Katharine McCarthy, a student representative on the Committee. Ms. McCarthy is a junior from Portage, MI, who is majoring in Philosophy. She is Secretary of Moot Court and is also a Resident Assistant.

Assessment Committee Members, Fall 2007
John Neuhoff, Chair, Research & Grants and Psychology

JaQuan Bryant, Student	Iain Crawford, VPAA
Theresa Ford, Assessment	Simon Gray, Computer Science
Henry Kreuzman, Philosophy	Elys Kettling Law, Library
Richard Lehtinen, Biology	William Macauley, English
Katharine McCarthy, Student	Thomas Wood, Music

Departments and Programs

Early in the semester, Chairs of departments and programs received a memo from Vice President of Academic Affairs, Iain Crawford, which outlined the two major goals in assessment for departments and programs this academic year:

1. to inform students about the learning goals within each major and minor, and
2. to collect assessment data via the direct and indirect measures developed last year and to report on this process using the Annual Assessment Report template.

John Neuhoff provided details of the HLC Focused Visit to faculty members during the Faculty Meeting on October 1, 2007.

Assessment Calendar

Meetings & Events

Oct 28-30, 2007	NCA Higher Learning Commission Site Visit The College of Wooster, Wooster, OH
Sep 14, 2007	Five Colleges of Ohio Teagle Project Project Orientation Workshop Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, OH
Sep 28, 2007	Creative and Critical Thinking Work Groups Kenyon College, Gambier, OH
Jan 11, 2008	Creative and Critical Thinking Work Groups Kenyon College, Gambier, OH
Feb 9, 2008	Project Symposium The College of Wooster, Wooster, OH

Department and Program Assessment

Sep 4, 2007	Exemplars' Planning Meeting
Sep 13, 2007	New Chairs' Meeting (returning from leave)
Sep 14, 2007	Exemplars' Report Template Meeting
Sep 20, 2007	Chairs' Meeting – Assessment Announcement
Oct 1, 2007	Faculty Meeting – Assessment Announcement
Oct 4, 2007	Chairs' Assessment Meeting

Conferences

Jan 23-26, 2008	AAC&U Annual Meeting Washington, DC
Apr 11-15, 2008	NCA Higher Learning Commission Annual Meeting, Chicago, IL

Assessment Matters is written by Theresa Ford, Director of Educational Assessment, with editing assistance from Sarah Sidor, Administrative Coordinator for Educational Assessment.

Higher Learning Commission Visit

The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools will send a two-person team to conduct the College's Focused Visit on Assessment from the evening of October 28 through the morning of October 30. Dr. Donald M. Bird, Deputy Department Head and Professor of Chemistry at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado will serve as Team Chair. Dr. James C. Foster, Vice President and Dean for Academic Affairs of Mount Marty College in Yankton, South Dakota is the second team member. They will be coordinating their visit schedule with the Vice President of Academic Affairs, Iain Crawford, and would like to meet with all Department and Program Chairs. The team will have office space in Morgan 218.

Annual Assessment Report Template

The annual assessment report template has been developed and is available on the assessment website at www.wooster.edu/assessment/AAR%20Template%20FINAL.pdf. Click on the Faculty link on the left sidebar and then click Annual Assessment Report Template. The due date for the report will be the first Monday in October annually, which for 2008 will be October 6. However, reports may be turned in prior to this date. The template requests that departments briefly report on learning goals addressed in assessment, the measures used, results, and feedback. It also provides space for a narrative to provide a context for the annual assessment and a space to describe the assessment plans for the coming year. Finally, it requests that departments and programs report where they are storing departmental assessment-related documents so that other department members will know where to look for them.

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).