Assessment Conversations

Walvoord and Departmental Assessment in a Nutshell
by Chris Inkster, LRTS Assessment Coordinator

One of the highlights of Convocation Days in January 2008 was the presence of Dr. Barbara Walvoord, professor emerita from the University of Notre Dame. She led a dynamic, half-day workshop titled “Making Departmental Assessment Clear, Simple, Sustainable, and Useful,” which was attended by 200 SCSU faculty, staff, and administrators.

Maybe you attended, but your notes are now somewhere in a year’s worth of syllabi, course assignments, student projects, departmental work, and your professional research and writing. Maybe you haven’t had a chance to implement any of Walvoord’s ideas, or didn’t get to hear her presentation. Or, maybe you’ve experimented with a few of Walvoord’s assessment ideas, and maybe your department now has at least a year’s experience of using her suggestions in your department assessment activities.

If you don’t yet count yourself in the experienced category, here are some highlights from Walvoord’s January 2008 workshop handouts to briefly summarize her main suggestions:

**The purpose of assessment is to make better decisions to enhance student learning within the available resources of time, expertise, and money.**

- If you are collecting information you aren’t using, *stop collecting it, or start using it.*
- If assessment is not helping you enhance student learning, *do it another way.*
- If assessment is taking more time than it’s worth, *cut back, start small, focus on the most important.*
- Assessment is the answer to educational fads.
- Assessment is most useful in situations of constrained time and resources, when you can’t afford the waste that results from seat-of-the-pants decision-making.
- Conduct good assessment that helps you use your resources most effectively for student learning and that is consonant with your institution’s needs and culture. THEN explain to accreditors and other audiences what you’re doing and why.

If you’ve successfully used ideas from the Walvoord January workshop, the Assessment Steering Committee invites you to let us know how your department has implemented her ideas. Just write a note sharing something about your experiences and send it to Assessment@stcloudstate.edu.
WALVOORD’S “BASIC, NO FRILLS DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT PLAN”

Need to quickly assess your department’s progress on assessment? Use Walvoord’s “Basic, No-Frills Department Assessment Plan” below to see how your department assessment matches up with her no-frills plan.

**Step 1.** Learning goals
- 3-10 goals; if an item is divisive, drop it for now; it’s useful to see where the goals are being taught – often called a program matrix.

**Step 2.**
- **a.** One direct measure that uses a set of criteria or rubric to assess.
  - Review of senior work by faculty teaching seniors. If students take a licensure or certification exam, this will be added as a second direct measure.
- **b.** One indirect measure
  - Walvoord’s first choice for indirect measure: Senior student surveys, exit interviews, and/or focus groups asking 3 questions:
    - Question 1. How well did you achieve each of the following departmental learning goals [use scale such as “extremely well, very well, adequately well, not very well, not at all”; list each department goal, with scoring scale for each].
    - Question 2. What aspects of your education in this department helped you with your learning, and why were they helpful?
    - Question 3. What might the department do differently that would help you learn more effectively, and why would these actions help?
  - Walvoord’s second choice for indirect measure: Alumni surveys (use 3 questions above; but hard to get good response rate).
  - Another measure: In some fields, job placement rates will be important.

**Step 3.** Annual meeting to discuss data and identify action items.

Start with the annual department meeting with all faculty, no matter how inadequate the data. Suggested format: two hours to discuss one program; consider having some students at the meeting; follow up with action items and who will do each.

Follow-up Steps:
- Examples of change based on assessment information.
- Recommendations for changes in the assessment process.

**ASKING UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS:**

**Q:** How should assessment work count toward promotion and tenure? When is it service, and when is it teaching effectiveness?

Because the purpose of assessment is to improve student learning, there is a strong connection between teaching excellence and assessment. If a faculty member makes changes in a course based upon assessment data and student learning improves as a result, most would view this as evidence of teaching effectiveness. But what about assessment at the program level? Program-level assessment often is regarded simply as service, but it may lead to changes in the program that improve student learning. Under what circumstances do you think assessment work at the program level can or should be regarded as evidence of teaching effectiveness?

**Email us your answer:** assessment@stcloudstate.edu

**But be forewarned - we might publish your response!**
IN THE KNOW:

Assessment Peer Consulting
Don’t know where to begin? Have questions? Need help? Let our assessment peer consultants come to your aid. They are available free of charge to assist programs, departments and units with any aspect of assessment of student learning. Go to www.stcloudstate.edu/assessment for additional details.

Advancing Program Assessment through Discussion (APAD)
Want to start a conversation in your department? Let us help you by subsidizing the purchase of books to feed the conversation! Go to www.stcloudstate.edu/assessment for additional details.

CLA in the Classroom
The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) is a standardized test used by SCSU that presents students with performance tasks in which they are provided multiple documents that represent potential sources of evidence. They are asked to write responses to questions, using the provided documents to support their answers. CLA in the Classroom trains faculty members to use a retired performance task (and scoring rubric) to design similar tasks for use in their courses. The second day of the training is devoted to developing these materials. The approach is very flexible and can be used in just about any discipline. Those who complete the training may train others at their own institution for free. Currently, the training costs $495 for persons affiliated with institutions that use the CLA. Institutions also may bring trainers to their campus to train faculty. SCSU probably will host a training session late in Spring 2009. During January Workshop Days a workshop on CLA in the Classroom will provide more information about this opportunity to interested faculty. Go to www.stcloudstate.edu/assessment for additional details.

HLC Assessment Academy
You may not be aware that SCSU is a member of the HLC Academy for Assessment of Student Learning. It offers HLC member institutions a four-year sequence of events and interactions that are focused on student learning, targeted at accelerating and advancing efforts to assess and improve student learning, and designed to build institution-wide commitment to assessment of student learning. SCSU is one of 13 institutions in the first cohort of the Assessment Academy. For more information, go to www.stcloudstate.edu/assessment

2008-9 Assessment Grants
The Assessment Steering Committee would like to congratulate the recipient’s of the 2008-9 Assessment Grants:
• Analysis of Program Data, refinement of assessment techniques and incorporation of findings to enhance program quality: Barbara Vesely (Community Psychology)
• Assessment of English 291: Introduction to Analytical and Rhetorical Writing: Richard Dillman and Judith Dorn (English)
• Assessment of Key Learning Outcomes in the SCSU Creative Writing Program: Judith Dorn and Shannon Olson (English)
• College ESL Program Assessment for Curriculum Management: Choonkyong Kim (English)
• Connecting with Recent Graduates of the Education Media Program: Sandra Williams, Marcia Thompson, Chris Inkster (Center for Information Media)
• Critical Thinking for Accounting Majors: Bruce Gaumnitz and Carol Gaumnitz (Accounting)
• Holistic and Authentic Assessment of a Professional Program: NWJ Hazelton (Geography)
• The Impact of the Racial Issues Requirement at SCSU: David Robinson, Luke Tripp, Kyoko Kishimoto, Michael Tripp, Darlene St. Clair, Jean LaCourt (Racial Issues Colloquium)
• Implementation of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment for Community Psychology Degree Program: Avelino Mills Novoa and Niloufer Merchant
• Major Field Test for 2009 Biological Sciences Graduates: William Cook and Matthew Julius (Biology)
• Purchase of the Item Information Analysis Report for the ETS Major Field Test in Business: Michael Ernst (HCOB)

Calendar

January 6, 2009:
9 am: Linking Course Level Assessment of Student Learning to Program Assessment
11:30 am: Fourth Annual Assessment Luncheon (by invitation only)
1 pm: Improving Assessment and Student Learning at the Program Level: Results of Projects Funded by the 2007-8 Assessment Grants
2:30 pm: CLA in the Classroom: A Flexible Tool for Assessing Student Learning

January 9, 2009:
9 am: Web Based System to Deepen Learning and Critical Thinking through Peer Reviewed Writing Assignments

January 21-24, 2009
American Association of Colleges & Universities Conference- “Ready or Not: Global Challenges, College Learning and America’s Promise”

February 5 and 6, 2009
The 2009 MnSCU Student Affairs Conference.

February 13 and 14, 2009
The Collaboration for the Advancement of College Teaching and Learning Winter 2009 Conference- “The Learning Educator: Fostering Our Own Development for Better Practice and Results”

February 22-24, 2009
The 9th Annual Assessment Conference at Texas A&M University- “Using Assessment to Drive Improvement”

February 26-28, 2009
American Association of Colleges & Universities Conference- “General Education, Assessment, and the Learning Students Need”

For additional information, please go to our website: www.stcloudstate.edu/assessment
Of the $20,000 available for assessment grants, $19,264.18 was awarded.

Contributors

Jim Sheroehman-
University Assessment Director

Chris Inkster
LR&TS Assessment Coordinator

Holly Evers
support staff

Contact us at:
University Assessment Office
MC 310
308-0133
www.stcloudstate.edu/assessment