

Conversations: Assessment @ BU

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Provost's Office welcomes new Assistant Provost for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The Provost's Office welcomes Sean McKittrick, who assumed the new position of Assistant Provost for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in June.

Sean's most recent position was Assessment and Accreditation Director at Indiana State University, where he worked closely with deans, associate deans, department chairs, and faculty on the development and implementation of assessment plans. He has also worked closely with faculty on developing assessment plans for grant applications, grant accountability designs, classroom assessment methods, and linkages of assessment with teaching and learning.

Originally from Hemet, California, Sean has served as Dean of Instruction at Bryant & Stratton College (Lackawanna, New York, campus) and as Academic Dean at Parks College (Thornton, Colorado, campus), and has taught numerous general education courses. He is married to Villate Brown McKittrick; both he and Villate are parents of three children—Amelia (6), Spencer (3), and Oliver (1).

In his new position, Sean stands ready to assist college administrators, department chairs, graduate and undergraduate directors, faculty, and other members of the Binghamton University community with assessment, program reviews, preparation for accreditation visits, and strategic planning.

New assessment resources on Provost's website

The Provost's website now has a number of resources for those desiring tips on assessment available at <http://provost.binghamton.edu/assessment.html>. In particular, a number of PowerPoint presentations are available on the following topics:

1. "Writing effective assessment plans"
2. "Using surveys for student learning assessment"
3. "Focus groups and assessment"

Assessment workshops announced for Fall 2006 semester

The Provost's Office is pleased to announce the organization of two workshops for the Fall semester:

Effective and Efficient Assessment: A Guide for Department Chairs (Friday, October 27)

Writing and Using Effective Assessment Plans (Friday, November 3)

Please call Debbie Dunn at x72150 to reserve a spot. Faculty and staff are also invited to view the Provost's website for additional workshops. Please view the list, identify two or more faculty or staff who would like to attend and which workshop you would like, and we will take care of the rest!

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“Assessment of student learning can be defined as the systematic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve learning.”

**Barbara E. Walvoord,
Notre Dame
University, Assessment
Clear and Simple**

Assessment tip: The 4 general questions of program assessment

As academic professionals, we have a lot on our plates. We have our own research initiatives, we plan and teach several courses a year, we advise students, devote ourselves to university service, and much more. A common concern expressed about assessment of student learning has to do with general expectations. What do program accrediting organizations, program reviewers, and regional accreditors, among others, expect?

When initially organizing, rethinking, or implementing an assessment program, we suggest answering four questions:

1. *Are student learning objectives clearly stated, understood, and applied by program/department faculty?*
2. *Are student learning objectives assessed in ways that are meaningful for faculty?*
3. *What are some ways that faculty meaningfully and regularly consider assessments in light of student learning objectives?*
4. *What evidence is there that faculty have used assessment information to improve student learning?*

Assessment plans should be based on what competencies, subject knowledge, and dispositions faculty believe students should have once they graduate from a program. These should be directly assessed, meaning that at least one assessment should involve the direct observations or measurement of student learning; however, it might also be useful for faculty to survey students, alumni, employers, and others to gather information about what principal parties believe is being learned.

Essential to the process is that faculty find the information meaningful so they can be the primary agents who discuss the quality of learning in a given program and then make recommendations to further enhance student learning.

Focus on results: Assessment examples

General Education (Laboratory Science)

In its assessment of General Education outcomes, Binghamton University asks a number of instructors to submit portfolios, which are then reviewed by members of an Assessment Category Team (ACT). The ACT then submits a report with findings and recommendations. In 2002-2003, the Laboratory Science ACT reviewed course portfolios and recommended that it needed to be more explicit when requesting materials. In subsequent discussions, it was recommended that instructors of Laboratory Science (L) courses should be made aware of the need for their courses to include hypothesis formulation and testing. In 2005-2006, course portfolios in Laboratory Science indicated that faculty were indeed stressing hypothesis formulation and testing and that instructors were well-prepared to reflect on student performance in this regard, sometimes supplying specific insights.

General Education (Oral Communication)

Instructors supplied course portfolios, some of which contained evaluations of group presentations by outside instructors. The results of the portfolio reviews revealed that 89% of BU students exceeded (29%) or met expectations (60%). In narratives supplied by instructors, students were praised for their creativity, initiative, and ability to organize and present interactive, participation-centered presentations. A number of faculty also noted that students might improve in respect to their dress and appearance, as well as relying on notes less. A few instructors mentioned that when students were given opportunities to present less formally, their ability to present ideas creatively

Focus on results (continued from page 2)

and coherently improved, perhaps because they were less nervous and more comfortable in such an environment. Other data, such as information from the Student Opinion Survey (SOS), indicates that senior students feel that Binghamton University offers them ample opportunity to master this outcome. When taken together, these various assessments indicate a few areas of improvement might be areas for further discussion by faculty groups, but that Binghamton University students perform quite well in this regard.

Undergraduate major (Psychology)

The undergraduate Psychology program uses, in part, a pre- and post-test approach to assessing student learning, as well as student surveys. Students take a test with questions that match specific areas of interest at the beginning of their core courses and complete an examination with most of the same questions at the end of their program. These are then tabulated and compared with the intent of helping Psychology faculty members understand whether or not the program is truly impacting student learning in the major.

Next issue: Asian and Asian-American Studies, MPA Program, and more

Questions & answers about assessment

We've heard a lot about the requirement that we assess student learning at major and program levels. But it seems so cumbersome and time-consuming. What are some ways to make this less so?

Initially organizing, initiating, implementing, and following-up on an effective assessment plan can be a daunting task, no doubt. Experience demonstrates, however, that the workload associated with assessment is initially time-consuming due to the time needed to identify student learning outcomes, design a plan, and so forth. But as this initial hurdle is surmounted, the amount of work decreases. The Provost's Office provides a number of resources to assist with the workload. In some cases, it can help facilitate meetings to create an assessment system. In other cases, it can assist with conducting assessments, inputting information, analyzing information, and even facilitating assessments that faculty may find meaningful, such as "Delphi" assessments, expert panels, surveys of employers, and creation and implementation of surveys. Working together, we might be able to find ways to make it less time-consuming and more meaningful. For ideas, please contact Sean McKitrick.

Where can we go to learn about ways to assess student learning, or to organize effective assessment plans?

The Provost's website contains a number of instructional presentations (PowerPoint) on various direct and indirect assessments of student learning, available at <http://provost.binghamton.edu/assessment.html>. We also conduct a number of workshops during the academic year. In addition, faculty, departments, and programs can request workshops having to do with specific topics of interest by either accessing the list of workshops on the website or by asking that a workshop be organized and taught. Just call Sean McKitrick at x72150 or email him at smckitri@binghamton.edu

"Our vision is to become a truly distinguished and unique institution of higher education, one that combines an international reputation for research, scholarship and creative endeavor with the best undergraduate programs available at any public university."

**Binghamton University,
"Implementing Our Strategies: A Roadmap to the Future"**

"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."

Albert Einstein

For more information:

Sean McKittrick, Assistant Provost for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
smckitri@binghamton.edu

Liz Abate, Assistant for Undergraduate Education
labate@binghamton.edu

Deborah Dunn, Secretary to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and International Affairs and the Assistant Provost for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
ddunn@binghamton.edu

Phone: x72150
FAX: x74831

<http://provost.binghamton.edu>

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Isn't all of this just a lot of "busywork?"

We hope not! It is our position that assessment, if carefully managed, can provide enough information so faculty can be empowered to act on the information they glean from the process. It is also our position that, given a developing environment nationally wherein faculty are often bypassed in respect to decisions made as result of student learning information, it is imperative that we work together as a community to assess student learning in ways that are meaningful. It is all about creating meaning, not just about complying with a mandate.

What does the SUNY system require with respect to assessment, as opposed to Binghamton University?

SUNY system requires that BU assess General Education outcomes, the results of which must be based on a faculty evaluation of student performance. Several instructors will be selected each year to grade student work according to a rubric worked on and passed by a number of SUNY faculty in the SUNY system. In the future, instructors who are randomly selected to participate will be invited to workshops to learn how to use the rubrics. After graduation this year, members of an "Assessment Category Team" will be

selected to grade a random sample of the graded samples to test for the reliability of the assessment and to organize a final report. In addition, BU chooses to assess its own students: randomly selected instructors are asked to submit samples of student work, an estimate of how many students "exceeded expectations," "met expectations," etc., as well as narratives about how their courses complied with General Education outcomes and their feelings about how well they feel students had performed. In both cases, the results are used to foster conversations about how to further enhance student performance in respect to the General Education student learning outcomes.

Binghamton University's Faculty Senate requires majors and programs to assess student work in respect to their own learning outcomes. Most programs and departments choose to assemble portfolios; the process is very much like that described above. However, the Faculty Senate also recognizes that faculty, programs, and departments might want further information. Working with the Assistant Provost for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, departments can enhance their assessment systems in ways that enable faculty to have meaningful, actionable conversations about the quality of student learning.

Do you have an assessment experience you'd like to share?

We continue to discover ways that various academic departments and programs are successfully and meaningfully assessing student learning. We are especially interested in understanding the challenges and successes associated with assessment and its impact on curriculum and student learning. If you can provide such an account, please send a brief description to Sean McKittrick at smckitri@binghamton.edu or x72150.