

Conversations: Assessment @ BU

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Fall 2007

Campus alumni survey launched this semester

The Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment collaborated with the Office of Alumni and Parent Relations on an e-mail survey of alumni. The survey was sent to over 6,000 alumni, asking them to evaluate their undergraduate experience in areas such as General Education, academic advising, overall instruction, student life, student services, and other areas of interest to the Binghamton University community.

Within one day after the electronic survey was sent, over 600 alumni had already responded; as of mid-September, over 1,050 alumni had responded. In addition to several closed-ended questions, alumni were asked to respond to an open-ended question about any suggestions or recommendations they would make to improve future students' experience at Binghamton. Over 300 alumni answered the open-ended question. In addition, alumni were asked if they were interested in participating in an electronic focus group that might enable the assessment office to better understand the results of the closed-ended survey; 167 alumni indicated that they were interested in participating.

The results of the survey can be used in several ways. One way is to relay information to major programs preparing for periodic reviews or accreditation visits. Department chairs, undergraduate directors, graduate directors, and faculty might also request the results of this assessment and use the results in combination with more direct assessments of student learning to enhance student learning, to make decisions about curriculum, or to design appropriate instructional techniques.

Some of the results of the survey will be reviewed in the spring semester newsletter. Those departments and programs who might be interested in using any data from these surveys in assessment should contact Sean McKittrick at smckitri@binghamton.edu or x72150.

Assessment progress reports for undergraduate majors now on website

Last year, undergraduate program directors were asked to complete an annual assessment report which answered the following questions:

- ◆ What are the student learning objectives for your program, and what changes, if any, have taken place?
- ◆ What assessment activity has occurred with regard to these objectives?
- ◆ What conversations have taken place as a result of this assessment activity?
- ◆ How have these assessments/conversations resulted in enhancements in teaching, student learning, or curricula?

The results were tabulated according to a common rubric (found in the report), resulting in the conclusion that departments and programs have made substantial progress in "closing the loop" with regard to assessment. The report, titled "2006-2007 Report and 2007-2008 Annual Plan," can be found online at <http://assessment.binghamton.edu/resources.html>.

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Student learning workshops to be held this semester

Several student learning workshops are planned this semester, including workshops on writing and social science. In response to last year's assessment information, the following workshops have been scheduled during the fall 2007 semester:

- ◆ **Workshop for Instructors of Gen Ed C Courses: Facilitating Meaningful Revision in Student Writing** - Friday, October 26, 9-11 a.m., Mandela Room
- ◆ **Graduate Director Assessment Workshop** - Friday, October 26, 1-3 p.m., UU-221B
- ◆ **Conversations about Social Science** - Monday, October 29, 8:30-10:30 a.m., PSPC Dining Room

The workshop on the General Education Composition requirement will be led by Kelly Kinney, Assistant Professor and Director of Composition for the Department of English, General Literature, and Rhetoric. The workshop will explore effective ways of coaching meaningful revision in student writing.

For the second workshop, graduate directors are invited to discuss challenges and solutions associated with assessment of master's and doctoral-level programs, with emphasis on simple and effective qualitative and quantitative methods that are department- or program-based and which have the highest potential for producing meaningful information for faculty.

The social science workshop will include undergraduate directors and instructors teaching General Education Social Science (N) courses. Participants will engage in conversations about what Binghamton University's aspirations are for student learning in the social sciences and what will make students majoring in the social sciences most competitive after they graduate.

Suggestions for future workshops are highly valued; please contact Sean McKittrick at smckitri@binghamton.edu or x72150 if you have any suggestions for future workshops.

Perspective: Using assessment to understand course and program efficacy

Assessment need not be used solely to evaluate programs or to write self-studies. In fact, assessment can be used by anyone in the division of Academic Affairs who desires information about their own effectiveness.

For example, the Evolutionary Studies program is endeavoring this semester to assess its effectiveness in encouraging students to think creatively, among other goals. In collaboration with the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, the program has begun surveying students enrolled in Evolutionary Studies courses as well as students not enrolled in the program to see if enrollment in the program can explain differences in student learning. The program also collaborated on the initial research and drafting of the survey, testing the survey, and recruiting students to complete the survey. Future actions will include in-putting surveys in databases, analyzing the results, and communicating those results in ways that are useful both for internal program evaluation and for possible publication.

A few other faculty members and programs have also expressed interest in assessing student learning for their courses or programs. Others have expressed interest in using course-level assessment as a method of enhancing instruction and student learning. Anyone interested in brainstorming ways to assess instructional effectiveness, student learning, and curriculum effectiveness for their own or for programmatic purposes should feel free to contact Sean McKittrick at smckitri@binghamton.edu or x72150.

*"I hear and I forget.
I see and I
remember. I do and
I understand."*

Confucius

Office of assessment: How can we assist you?

The Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment's goal is to assist programs and offices within the division of Academic Affairs in assessing student learning and institutional effectiveness in various ways.

Some examples of how we can assist are as follows:

- ◆ Grant applications. We have assisted a number of applicants in designing accountability plans to satisfy grant constituents' request for information about how a specific grant has impacted student learning or institutions.
- ◆ Classroom-level studies of student learning. We continue to assist individual instructors who desire information on how well specific teaching strategies, curricula, and initiatives impact student learning. Such studies have usually involved confidential assessments for the instructor's information only. However, in some cases, instructors have expressed interest in publishing the results of such studies.
- ◆ Focus groups. We have assisted depart-

ments and programs in conducting student focus groups to better understand various issues, depending on the interest of the program/department.

- ◆ Direct assessment of student learning. A number of departments have requested information about direct assessments that they could develop for their own assessment purposes, such as course-level examinations and portfolio assessments.
- ◆ Assistance with self-studies, strategic planning, and upcoming accreditation visits. We have assisted several departments in their search for information in preparation for periodic review self-studies. In several cases, this has included brainstorming about what information is available, discovering assessment information that can be used, and determining what additional information can be utilized for writing meaningful self-studies.

Those interested in assistance in these or other areas should contact Sean McKittrick at smckitri@binghamton.edu or x72150.

"Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80. Anyone who keeps learning stays young."

Henry Ford

"It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."

John Wooden

Assessment Category Teams complete Gen Ed assessment

The assessment category teams (ACTs) in Social Science, Humanities, Aesthetics and critical thinking completed their assessment work this fall.

ACT members, chosen by the Faculty Senate, review course portfolios submitted by instructors teaching courses in the various General Education areas. In general, the ACTs found that student learning was satisfactory in all areas. The ACTs also submitted the following recommendations that they felt might further enhance student learning:

- ◆ Conduct a workshop that informs faculty and other interested parties about database resources available to students when conducting research;
- ◆ Conduct another workshop on Composition to enable faculty teaching Composition courses to engage in conversations about the student learning objectives in C courses;
- ◆ Continue working with faculty to ensure that student learning objectives in General Education courses are made explicit to students; and
- ◆ Organize a number of focus groups to better understand students' expectations with regard to their learning in various General Education courses.

Each ACT is briefed whenever the team's recommendations are implemented. This year, the Educational Policies and Procedures Committee (EPPC) will review the assessment reports and their recommendations and may suggest further recommendations if it so chooses.

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Using Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs)

Have you experienced the following scenario? You are grading final examinations or projects. After grading all of them, you find that many students did not grasp an important concept, but you realize that it is now too late to teach these concepts because the end of the semester has already arrived.

Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) are used by faculty to assess strengths and weaknesses in student learning at the beginning and middle of a semester. In contrast to formal assignments such as midterm exams, they can be used to gather information about student learning and usually take only 10-15 minutes. They can also be combined with active teaching techniques to help students learn more quickly.

Some examples of CATs are:

Application Questions: These are brief questions in which you ask students to work either individually or in groups to solve a specific problem. After 5-10 minutes, and after moving around the room to assess the quality of problem solving, you then engage students in a discussion about where they feel they had difficulty.

Student Inventory: At the beginning of a semester, you ask students to complete a survey about themselves and about courses they have taken previously, adding a few questions or problems to help you assess to what extent students have met prerequisites and to what extent you might need to conduct refresher sessions.

Directed Paraphrasing: At the end of a presentation about a complicated concept, you ask students to explain, summarize, or restate the concept. This technique is especially helpful to faculty teaching students in professional programs such as marketing, public administration, and social work, where students will need to explain these concepts in uncomplicated ways that the public can understand.

Next semester, a workshop will be held on using CATs. Those interested in learning more might want to review a book on CATs, such as Angelo and Cross's *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers* (1993: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2nd Edition).

Assessment Resources: Websites and Blackboard Organization

Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment website

(<http://assessment.binghamton.edu>)

This website contains resources on General Education assessment, major assessment, workshops, and other information and announcements, including instructional slides on assessment methods and sample rubrics to be used in the Strengthening Campus Based Assessment (SCBA) process.

“Assessment at Binghamton University” Blackboard (Bb) Organization

This organization contains resources for the Binghamton University community, including articles and papers on the most recent political, social, and policy trends in assessment, PowerPoint presentations, research studies on assessment, sample assessment reports and plans, and an “Exhibit Fair” containing exemplary assessment reports and plans from BU departments and programs. Those interested in being enrolled should contact Sean McKittrick, Assistant Provost for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, at smckitri@binghamton.edu or x72150.

Internet Resources of Higher Education Outcomes Assessment

This comprehensive resource, <http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm>, contains links to assessment resources from hundreds of colleges and universities in the United States, including sample assessment plans, instruments, and reports.