

Conversations: Assessment @ BU

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Summer 2007

Student response rate high for NSSE survey

During the spring 2007 semester, randomly selected first-year and senior students completed the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), a nationally recognized survey that will help the university understand how well students are engaged in their academic and social environment at Binghamton University. To access the survey instrument, go to http://nsse.iub.edu/html/survey_instruments_2007.cfm

As of June 1, the overall response rate for BU was 36 percent; a total of 710 first-year students and 560 senior students responded. (Last year, the average response rate on the NSSE for our institutional type was 33 percent.) We want to thank all those who helped get the word out about the NSSE, including first-year programs, student affairs, deans and associate deans, and the many staff at college levels who took some of their time to work on the response rate campaign—congratulations on work well done!

With regard to assessment, the NSSE can be used in several different ways. Departments and programs who have had enough students respond to the survey can access the information to better understand how well students feel they are writing, communicating, working with peers, and engaging with people from different backgrounds, among other items of interest. At college and division levels, interested parties can do the same. During the 2007-2008 academic year, after the NSSE results arrive, we will be having division-wide discussions about how the results might be used by various parties. One of the best features of the survey is that the results can be compared with the results of like institutions, as well as with all other institutions participating in the NSSE this academic year.

BU case study featured at international assessment conference

Binghamton University's efforts at assessing critical thinking/information management during the spring 2007 semester were featured in the Re-Engineering Assessment Practices (REAP) conference, an initiative of the Scottish Funding Council, which included over 400 participants from over 30 countries. The conference, which was held entirely online May 29 through 31, featured several case studies for discussion by those attending. Binghamton University's case study, which described how critical thinking/information management was assessed and then communicated through Faculty Senate subcommittees, was one of 22 case studies discussed by delegates over the three-day period.

All conference case studies will be made available in June to the Binghamton University community in the Blackboard organization "Assessment at Binghamton University." The case studies contain strategies for in-class assessments in various subject areas, suggested actions for teaching successfully in online courses, and descriptions of assessment-based teaching techniques for both the traditional classroom and online courses.

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Results of 2006-2007 internship surveys reported

Collaborating with Off Campus College (OCC), the Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment studied what internship supervisors had to say about Binghamton University interns. The first study was an analysis of the internship surveys that OCC asks supervisors to complete; the second was an electronic focus group (Delphi study) of selected internship supervisors. Among the results were the following:

- ◆ Internship supervisors felt that Binghamton University interns are willing to help, dependable, friendly, eager to learn, enthusiastic, conscientious, caring, and willing to try new experiences, and that they have positive attitudes and take the initiative in the workplace.
- ◆ Regarding students' activities in the workplace, supervisors agree that students have a good amount of interest, are responsible, punctual, hard working, able to learn quickly, able to take advice, and able to devote time to new projects.
- ◆ Regarding students' academic abilities, supervisors feel strongly that Binghamton University interns are good with computers, data collection and research and have good analytical and organizational skills.
- ◆ Regarding students' ability to work with others, internship supervisors strongly feel that Binghamton University interns are able to work with diverse groups of people, are personable, have good teamwork skills, and exhibit good leadership qualities.
- ◆ Internship supervisors participating in the electronic focus group appeared to agree with the above, but also felt Binghamton University students might improve in the area of accepting critiques from others, especially with regard to oral communication skills.

In combination with other assessments, such as General Education course portfolios, this assessment information will be made available to ACTs and other interested parties as part of a wider process of assessing student learning. It also addresses concerns expressed by employers and business leaders (at least at the national level) that students need better preparation in creativity, problem solving, and working with diverse groups of people. (For more information, see Conference Board, "Are they really ready to work," 2006, http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/documents/FINAL_REPORT_PDF9-29-06.pdf)

Gen Ed Assessment Category Teams to review course portfolios

During the 2006-2007 academic year, the Faculty Senate's Committee on Committees selected faculty to serve on General Education Assessment Category Teams (ACTs). Each ACT represents one of the General Education areas of emphasis (e.g., Humanities, Pluralism, Composition, critical thinking, Global Interdependencies, etc.) and plays an integral part in assessing student learning. This year, four ACTs will write student learning assessment reports: Aesthetics, Humanities, Social Science, and Physical Activity/Wellness.

Faculty in each of these groups will be reviewing course portfolios that have been submitted over the last three years by instructors teaching in each area. They will then look at any other assessment information that they might wish to review (such as the results of relevant NSSE surveys, etc.) and then make conclusions about the quality of student learning with regard to the student learning outcomes in each area. A report will then be submitted this fall to the Educational Policies and Procedures Committee (EPPC), which will then review the findings and make further recommendations for action. Last semester, the EPPC reviewed the findings of the critical thinking/information management ACT. Overall, the findings were positive about student learning in this area, but the EPPC made recommendations to further enhance students' abilities in using information databases in greater depth.

"Good teaching is one-fourth preparation and three-fourths pure theatre."

Gail Godwin

Focus on “closing the loop”: School of Education evaluates student learning objectives at workshop

At the end of the spring 2007 semester, the School of Education (SOE) held a student learning workshop in which they evaluated student learning objectives using available assessment information, including student practicum evaluations, state licensure scores, and alumni data. The workshop was divided into two tasks.

The first of these tasks was to gather assessment-based feedback on how the school as a whole was preparing student teachers with regard to general student learning objectives. The SOE staff first prepared documents demonstrating what such assessments had to say about how well teacher candidates were learning in six distinct areas and then asked participants to divide into three groups, each of which evaluated two of these areas. They then regrouped and discussed strengths and weaknesses in the assessments and what the assessments had to say about student learning.

The second task was to gather feedback

from faculty about student learning in each program—elementary education, secondary education, literacy, and special education.

The SOE staff prepared documents describing what assessments had to say about student learning with regard to each program. Program faculty then discussed the assessment information, what such information had to say about the degree to which students were learning, and what actions they would recommend to address trends revealed by the assessment information.

The day ended with a general review of the process, suggestions for enhancing the assessment system, and recommendations for follow-ups to the seminar’s discussions. Congratulations to SOE faculty and staff for providing one of several models to the university on how to use assessment information and how to “close the loop” by moving from assessment collection to discussions about assessment results and then to actions taken as a result of what was revealed by the information and subsequent discussions.

“Providing evidence of effectiveness does not equal learning about effectiveness.”

**Bill Kirkwood,
East Tennessee State
University**

“Learning is the product of the activity of learners.”

John Holt

Spring ISCL workshops: Backwards design and large lecture halls

The Center for Learning and Teaching (CLT) and the Institute for Student Centered Learning (ISCL) held two workshops this spring, both of which touched upon assessment.

The first, held in January, helped participants understand how to teach successfully in a large lecture-hall format. Part of the discussion had to do with using formative assessment, in this case classroom assessment techniques (CATs), as a means of helping instructors understand how well students were grasping concepts and how to pace content delivery successfully. Sean McKittrick, Assistant Provost for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, briefly spoke about one well-known resource in particular, Angelo & Cross’ *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*, which is available in the ISCL’s resource area.

The second was a two-day workshop on backwards design, in which participants learned more about how to design lessons based on student learning objectives. Those participating were encouraged to first think about their objectives, then to think about how to assess to what degree students were attaining such objectives, and then to create instruction and activities that help maximize learning. The workshop was highly interactive, and those attending were able to come out of the meeting with a better understanding of how to design, assess, and deliver instruction that focuses on maximizing opportunities for student learning.

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Resources on assessment available on Blackboard site

As has been our practice over the last year, a Blackboard organization, "Assessment at Binghamton University," has been established for anyone wanting to obtain a beginning or advanced knowledge of assessment issues, such as how to perform student learning assessment or how to write assessment reports and plans.

In this Blackboard organization, six tabs can be found on the left-hand side of the screen. They include the following resources:

- ◆ A **"welcome"** tab, describing the purpose of the Blackboard organization and containing general announcements;
- ◆ A **"reference library"** tab, which contains the latest news on assessment since summer 2006, studies on the impact of assessment on student learning, sample assessment reports and summaries, instructional slides on assessment methods, and notes from various assessment conferences prior to 2006;

- ◆ A **"hot off the press(es)"** tab, containing the current and past issues of this newsletter, notes and resources from 2006 and 2007 assessment conferences and other recent resources;
- ◆ An **"important links"** tab, containing links to assessment web sites. Most notably, it contains a link to a general clearinghouse of assessment websites throughout the United States;
- ◆ An **"exhibit fair"** tab, containing sample assessment plans and summaries; and
- ◆ An **"instruction"** tab, which contains resources with regard to links between quality instruction and assessment (both formative and summative) as well as resources about assessing student learning in the classroom.

The box below outlines how to join the organization, as well as additional resources available to the public. We look forward to your membership in the organization, which currently has over 100 members!

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 smckittri@binghamton.edu or x72150.

Internet Resources of Higher Education Outcomes Assessment

This comprehensive resource contains links to assessment resources from hundreds of colleges and universities in the United States, including sample assessment plans, instruments, and reports. The site also contains a good number of instructional slides and other resources and can be accessed by clicking on the following link:

<http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm>