

# Conversations: Assessment @ BU

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## Office of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment offers services to all units in Academic Affairs

As the national and state environment continues to stress accountability for student learning, the Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment has been working with colleges, departments, programs, and offices to provide support in their assessment activities. Here are some ways we continue to offer assistance to department chairs, undergraduate and graduate directors, administrators, and faculty:

- ◆ Assisting with self studies, periodic review documents, and accreditation reports by finding efficient and meaningful ways to assess student learning and other activities within Academic Affairs.
- ◆ Finding information which can be inputted into databases and aggregated so groups of faculty can learn more about the quality of student learning in their programs. For example, we are assisting the Department of Social Work and Department of Human Development in inputting field (practicum) experience survey information, analyzing the information, and communicating the information in succinct ways that help faculty understand strengths and weaknesses in student learning with regard to specific student learning expectations.
- ◆ Designing electronic email surveys for use by departments—we have an account with [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) that enables us to send email invitations to alumni, students, faculty, and others, to complete surveys that can be used to better understand the quality of student learning, quality of advisement, and other things important to departments.

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### How can our office assist you?

The Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment stands ready to assist individual faculty, certificate programs, academic programs, and departments in their efforts to assess student learning. Please contact Sean McKittrick, Assistant Provost for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, at [smckitri@binghamton.edu](mailto:smckitri@binghamton.edu) or x72150.

To register for workshops, contact Debra Sanders, secretary to the Assistant Provost, at [dsanders@binghamton.edu](mailto:dsanders@binghamton.edu) or x72150.

### Future Assessment Workshops

As a result of conversations with faculty, these workshops are planned for Fall 2008:

- ◆ Designing Effective Assessments (tentative: October 2008)
- ◆ Defining Student Learning Outcomes (tentative: November 2008)
- ◆ Using Classroom Assessment Techniques for Effective Teaching (tentative: November 2008)
- ◆ Conversations about Student Learning in Oral Communication (tentative: November 2008)



## Strategic planning and assessment

Our next accreditation visit by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools will occur during the 2010-2011 academic year. Although the visit is three years away, each accredited institution is expected to offer documentation that its certificate programs, programs of study, departments, and services engage in assessment on a regularly scheduled, periodic basis.

Each department, program of study, and academic office/service should have an assessment plan with the following components:

1. clearly stated student learning objectives/goals/expectations;
2. a number of assessments that inform faculty about student learning with regard to item 1;
3. evidence that faculty discuss what these assessments have to say and that faculty have made plans (in some form) to address strengths and weaknesses discovered through the process in their curriculum or teaching; and
4. faculty and department leaders can provide information about how these plans have been implemented and how such implementation has led to enhancing student learning.

As we do each Spring and Summer, we are asking department chairs, undergraduate directors, and graduate directors to provide progress reports on these four components. By Spring 2010, we will ask all departments to provide narratives about how the implementation of the assessment plans has impacted student learning. For most departments, this involves simply collecting short narratives from faculty about how they have used assessment information to help them develop lesson plans, to inform them about areas to focus on as they teach. For all programs, this involves submitting a report that documents how the above-stated four components have been put into place. It is important to continue the process if it is ongoing or to develop and implement an assessment plan as soon as possible. There are many fairly non-invasive ways to conduct assessment in all programs of study. Please contact Sean McKitrick for assistance at [smckitri@binghamton.edu](mailto:smckitri@binghamton.edu).

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### Office of CI&A offers services

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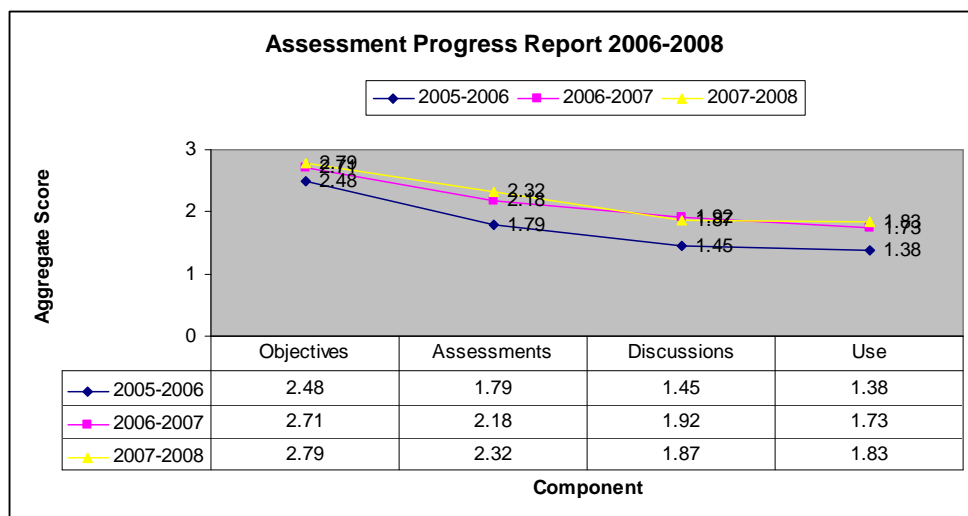
- ◆ Developing assessment plans for grant applications in the hopes of addressing sponsors' requirements that such plans are part of the application process. We have also participated in research associated with grants to help demonstrate the effectiveness of grant programs once they are implemented. For example, we have conducted focus group research with one grant both to assess its effectiveness and to develop manuscripts for publication.
- ◆ Conducting workshops with faculty in which faculty review assessment results and make specific action plans to inform their own teaching decisions, enhance curriculum, and impact research.

These are a few ways we continue to offer assistance. Please contact us should you wish to access support as described above or to discuss any other way in which assessment can be used to impact what you do.

***“I'll know that you really understand what assessment is about when you come to me and say, ‘We had this problem. Here's what we tried. We assessed it. It failed miserably. And here's what we're going to do differently next time.’ ”***

**Gary R. Pike, IUPUI,  
as quoted in  
InsideHigherEd.com,  
May 27, 2008**

## Binghamton makes assessment progress



Every year, the Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment asks departments to report on the status of assessment with regard to:

1. clearly stated student learning goals;
2. assessment activity;
3. faculty-based discussions of assessment information and recommendations stemming from such discussions; and
4. implementation of recommendations to enhance the originally-stated student learning goals.

During the last three years, assessment reports have been evaluated using a rubric that evaluates reports in each category on a 3-point scale (3=program has engaged in activity; 2=program plans or is about to engage in activity; 1=program has not engaged in activity). The aggregate scores, reported above, indicate that the university is making substantial progress in each area, although continued efforts are needed with regard to discussing assessment findings and using information to impact curriculum and teaching.

In future years, the Office of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment will conduct workshops to continue assisting departments in making progress in these areas. We greatly appreciate all departments' efforts so far!

### Rubric-oriented assessment for Spring/Summer 2008

As part of SUNY's Strengthening Campus Based Assessment (SCBA) initiative, Binghamton has been participating in the assessment of student learning in mathematics/reasoning this Spring. A number of evaluators have been trained in the use of the rubric, and have submitted their scores to the Provost's Office, which is currently analyzing the information. So far, assessments demonstrate that Binghamton University students perform satisfactorily with regard to math and reasoning.

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*“If we are to have meaningful assessment, we shall need to assess something more precise than ‘liberal education’ and broader than student performance in courses. The courage and capacity to assess is dependent upon institutions' doing something other than putting the pea under a different shell. Defining what we want to assess as a general, or liberal, education is the real issue, and resolving it will take massive reimagination.”*

**Stanley N. Katz,**  
Princeton University,  
quoted in *Chronicle of Higher Education*,  
May 20, 2008

## For more information:

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## Conversations: Assessment @ BU

### Gen Ed portfolios: Why they are so meaningful

We are thrilled to report that General Education assessment has already yielded meaningful information about the quality of student learning at Binghamton University. Each semester, approximately 30 instructors of record are asked to submit portfolios to be assessed by assessment category teams (ACTs) in three-year cycles.

Already, the results of these assessments in Aesthetics, Humanities, Social Sciences, and Activity/Wellness have resulted in rich, informative conversations about defining student learning objectives that best match with each General Education area, about teaching students to revise their work and to conduct more in-depth research, and about specifying General Education outcomes that better communicate the importance of the liberal arts.

A recent survey of those who have submitted portfolios reveals that over 90 percent agree that they have had sufficient time to complete informative

portfolios (despite some very busy schedules), and 100 percent agreed that they feel the portfolios they submit provide meaningful information about student learning.

Why is the use of portfolios important in assessment? The most important answers to this question are that portfolios involve faculty (whom we should always assume to be the primary assessors of student learning), they supply information that appears more valid, and they provides more specific information that can motivate faculty to move from discussing the assessment information to acting on the information in ways that are more likely to impact student learning. For example, some faculty who have participated in conversations have committed themselves to specifying student learning objectives in their General Education courses.

Thank you to everyone who has participated so far by submitting portfolios—your work is having an impact!

#### Rubric-oriented assessment

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Two more rubric-oriented assessment activities are also occurring. The first exercise involves collecting 89 samples of student work from 100-level courses and asking three evaluators to use the SCBA critical thinking rubric to assess the quality of student learning in this area. In May, a random sample of 35 of the original samples was taken and submitted to the raters, who were trained on the use of these rubrics last year. The second exercise will involve taking the same random sample and submitting them to three raters who will use the SCBA composition rubric in Summer 2008.

As described in the Winter 2008 newsletter, because our conceptual framework involves focus on meaningfulness of the information, the raters will also engage in small focus groups to help give additional meaning to the results of the rubric grading. After reviewing the results both qualitatively and quantitatively, we will then submit final reports to the Provost and to Faculty Senate leaders. The results will then be discussed in combination with other assessment information in order to discuss ways to enhance student learning in these areas even further at Binghamton University.