

Conversations: Assessment @ BU

Volume 3, Issue 3

Summer 2009

Programs continue making progress in assessment

In preparation for an upcoming visit by our regional accreditor, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIRA) has asked for reports from each department regarding assessment in undergraduate and graduate programs. OIRA then evaluates these reports to ascertain what progress is being made with regard to assessment in these programs.

A graph (shown on page 2) depicts the progress departments have made over the years in student learning assessment. Departments are increasingly demonstrating progress in using assessment information to help them assist students in their learning. For example, the Arabic Studies program uses a curriculum based on national norms and uses its assessment process to gauge how quickly and comprehensively students are acquiring language skills. School of Management faculty assess students according to specific student learning outcomes and goals and are then able to base curriculum and instructional changes upon such assessments. Other programs use expert panels, rubrics, and evaluations of student work in capstone courses to evaluate how well students are mastering specific student learning outcomes.

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Senior survey results are in!

In cooperation with the Division of Student Affairs, the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment administered a survey to all graduating seniors, of whom 705 responded (a 31 percent response rate).

The results provide interesting information for discussion in the area of student learning assessment.

- ◆ When asked how well Binghamton University prepared them for working with students different than them, seniors rated the institution highly—92 percent rated the institution well

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New office of Institutional Research and Assessment

Due to organizational changes in the Provost's Office, the Office of Institutional Research and Planning and the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment were merged into the newly formed Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

Sean McKitrick will serve as Assistant Provost and Director of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, and Dan Jardine will serve as Associate Director. Jill Heneghan, Cathy Gentile, Alisa Martin, Pam Keefe Archer and Deb Sanders will also serve in the office. The extension for the front office (AD-306) is x72365.

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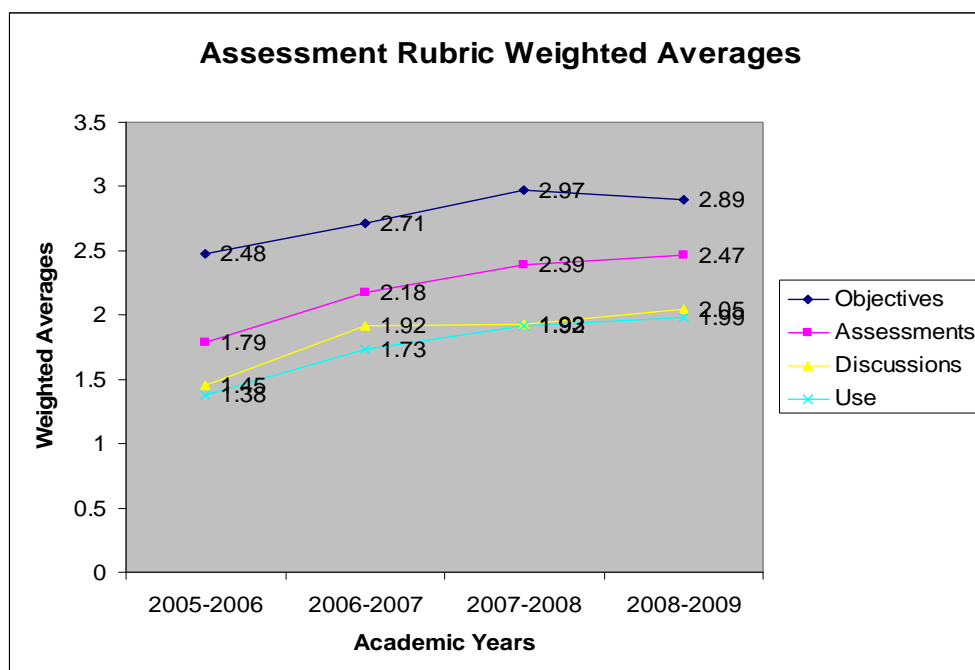
Portfolio assessment survey reveals satisfaction

As part of the General Education assessment process, faculty submit course portfolios for review by assessment category teams (ACTs). At the end of each semester (Fall/Spring), faculty who submit portfolios are asked to complete a survey. The results of this survey are then tabulated and shared with the Provost, Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education, and the General Education Coordinator in order to understand how to support faculty participating in the process.

The results indicate high levels of satisfaction with the process as a result of increased efforts to conduct one portfolio workshop each semester and to further interact with participating faculty. Over 90 percent of those who completed the

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Progress in assessment *(continued from page 1)*



As a whole, the graph shows that departments and programs are between “fully developed” (3.0) and “developing” (2.0) with regard to:

1. having developed student learning outcomes
2. assessing the student learning outcomes
3. discussing the results of the assessments in department and/or program meetings
4. using the results in teaching, curriculum choices, etc.

Although they demonstrate progress, these results indicate that further work is warranted in the area of formally using assessment results to enhance learning and teaching, a subject of future workshops in the Fall 2009 and Spring 2010 semesters.

“If you ask any faculty, they couldn’t recite the numbers, but they’ll tell you we’re doing a better job...”

Hermann Berliner,
Provost of Hofstra
University, as
quoted in
InsideHigherEd.com,
April 23, 2009,
speaking about the
use of survey
assessment data at
Hofstra

Senior survey results *(continued from page 1)*

- with regard to encouraging them to work with students different than them, and 88 percent rated Binghamton well with regard to teaching seniors how to respect the cultures, attitudes and customs of others.
- ◆ Seniors feel that the university prepared them well with regard to knowing how to gather (90 percent) and analyze information (90 percent) but rated the institution lower in helping them understand methods used to explore the world around them in ways that are objective and impartial (81 percent). Seventy-two percent rated the university well with regard to applying mathematical or statistical skills.
 - ◆ Seniors believe that the university prepared them well to learn independently (90 percent) and to acquire knowledge and skills for intellectual growth throughout their lives (90 percent).
 - ◆ Eight-eight percent of seniors felt that Binghamton University prepared them well to organize their thoughts in written projects; 85 percent felt the university prepared them well to communicate orally in front of a group of people. However, 80 percent believed the institution prepared them well with regard to writing grammatically correct sentences and phrases.

We encourage faculty to discuss the senior survey results and to use them, in combination with other student learning assessment information, to inform their curriculum choices as they design their syllabi and lesson plans. Given a sufficient number of responses, department- and program-specific senior survey information will be sent to departments this summer. Please contact Cathy Gentile at x72052 or cgentile@binghamton.edu for more information.

"Students need to know that there are important goals for their college learning, and our members have a long way to go on that one."

Carol Geary-Schneider,
American Association
of Colleges and
Universities, as
quoted in
InsideHigherEd.com,
April 28, 2009

Portfolio survey *(continued from page 2)*

survey are pleased with the level of support they have received, and over 85 percent believe that the portfolio information they submit contains meaningful information that can be used in the assessment of General Education. One faculty respondent commented:

The process is/was very useful... It helped me to see the strength in the planning and carrying out of my course purposes and goals. Support for completing the portfolio was available whenever I needed it and the support I received was most useful. The process might be improved if there were timeframe benchmarks throughout the semester to help faculty self-check their process in collating the materials to be submitted.

The OIRA and the coordinator of General Education will continue to lend support to faculty who have graciously agreed to participate. Thank you to everyone who has participated so far!

Upcoming Events

- ◆ **Webinar: The Keys to a Culture of Assessment: Value and Respect**
July 22, 2009, 1-2:30 p.m.
- ◆ **Webinar: Getting Started with Assessing Institutional Effectiveness**
August 4, 2009, 1-2:30 p.m.

For more information:

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Student learning assessment: Why and how it supports teaching and learning

First and foremost, student learning assessment is intended to enhance teaching and learning. Unfortunately, political mandates to assess have created the impression that assessment is merely for reporting and keeping the state off our backs, when in reality it is intended to provide faculty with information so they can address any weaknesses that have been discovered as a result of the assessment process.

Last year the Office of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment circulated a *Student Learning Report* to all faculty members via email, which identified strengths and weaknesses in student learning. The purpose of the document was to inform faculty about areas in which students might perform better. For example, General Education assessments have revealed that students can perform better with regard to synthesizing and analyzing information, as well as using library resources. These results were described in the *Student Learning Report*, as well as in the Spring 2009 issue of this newsletter. Faculty can use this information to address these issues – for example, by inviting university library faculty in to discuss library resources to students, by creating course assignments that require students to practice critical thinking skills, etc.

Next year, starting with the Fall 2009 newsletter, we will focus on ways departments, programs, and faculty are using assessment information to enhance student learning and to inform their teaching. Faculty wishing further access to assessment information in order to enhance their students' learning should contact Sean McKitrick at smckitri@binghamton.edu or at x76938.

How the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment Can Help

OIRA always offers its services to academic departments and programs, university units, faculty, and others to help them use student learning assessment information to enhance what they do every day. Some examples include:

- ◆ OIRA has assisted those writing grants by helping design surveys, brainstorming about ways to fold assessment information into grant applications, organizing pre- and post grant assessment strategies, conducting focus groups, helping write reports including assessment information, etc. So far, those who have taken us up on our offer to assist have generally experienced success, especially given new demands by grant funders to include assessment information in applications.
- ◆ OIRA works with departments and programs on conducting expert panels (used to assess student learning by discussing the quality of student learning after exams, etc.); organizing electronic alumni, senior, and faculty surveys; and assisting departments in inputting and analyzing survey and other information.
- ◆ OIRA has presented information to faculty about student learning assessment, especially with regard to developing assessment plans and approaches and using assessment information to enhance student learning and teaching.

If you would like assistance, please contact Sean McKitrick at x76938 or at smckitri@binghamton.edu