

April 18, 2007

Dear Dept Chairs and Program Coordinators,

Earlier this spring semester, Dean Cornwell requested that the Assessment Committee review each department's and program's assessment pilot project proposals in order to provide constructive feedback in advance of the next phase of this initiative, the implementation of assessment methods. To facilitate your work, we first provided guidelines for outlining and submitting the proposed project. We now attempt to provide systematic feedback using a template that reflects standard elements of the original guidelines and general perceptions of the reviewers. Attached, please find the completed feedback template for your department or program. The comments are specific to your submitted pilot project and while not comprehensive, are intended to assist with future revisions as your department or program moves forward with assessment process.

In addition, information about the pilot project review process and the Assessment Committee recommendations that grew out of it are detailed below.

Pilot projects received prior to April 13 were divided into the sciences, arts and humanities, and the social science and interdisciplinary programs. Groups of three to four assessment committee members read, discussed, and provided feedback on their assigned groupings over the course of three committee meetings. At the end of this process, the committee reassembled to identify common issues and to think about ways in which we might support departments and programs while they attempt their projects. We concluded that portfolio reviews and survey administration are the two preferred assessment methods for academic departments and programs and while each is quite useful for different reasons, each also poses challenges.

Portfolio review is a direct assessment method that uses students' own work as evidence of achieving specific learning goals. In order for portfolio reviews to serve their purpose and result in rich, useful information, they require the development of a scoring rubric that represents a comprehensive, agreed upon set of evaluation criteria.

In addition to reviewing student portfolios, many departments and programs expect to assess student learning indirectly by using surveys. Three clear concerns emerged from our committee's discussion: 1). writing surveys that yield useful, reliable, valid data and analyzing that data requires some expertise; 2). the number of surveys under consideration and the expectations about support for them would considerably overburden the Institutional Research Office; 3). and perhaps most importantly, our student body already completes a

plethora of institutionally sponsored surveys and we are concerned about survey fatigue and low response rates. With these caveats in mind, we raise the possibility of using an alternative indirect assessment method to learn about student perceptions of their learning: focus groups.

To further support the work of academic departments and programs the Assessment Committee proposes **three half-day workshops** one during **the week of May 28 (rubric development)** and **two in late August (survey development & facilitating focus groups)** prior to the start of classes. **We ask that each department, but especially those intending to use the specific methods, send at least two faculty members to these practical, hands-on sessions in order to launch your pilot projects. Online registration will be required and all faculty attendees will receive a stipend.**

In addition to the planned workshops, the Assessment Committee is working with Christine Zimmerman to develop a more regularized dissemination of institutional data that speaks to student learning outcomes. For example, starting this summer, the Office of Institutional Research will make results from the senior survey available to all departments. Although the IR office does not have the resources to provide customized data analysis for individual departments, the Assessment Committee will solicit feedback from academic departments and programs on the degree to which the shared data are helpful for assessment purposes and recommend modifications accordingly.

On behalf of the Assessment Committee, we appreciate the reciprocal nature of this assessment work and welcome the opportunity to talk about this feedback and about assessment practices in your department or program.

Kim Mooney
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