



ASSESSMENT MATTERS

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Promoting a Culture of Assessment by Pixy (Sharmila) Ferris

As with many other institutions of higher education today, William Paterson University is working to promote a culture of assessment. Ideally, such a culture is one in which faculty and administrators agree on assessment needs, set explicit goals for assessment, work together towards these common goals, and use assessment to improve teaching and learning. By the standards established by the researchers Olsen, Wygant, Esplin and Kristensen at Brigham Young University, William Paterson is progressing well towards promoting a positive culture of assessment. Their criteria include the following factors:

Leadership: A person or committee is appointed to address issues of "learning outcomes."

Resources: Sustainable resources are available to meet assessment needs.

Grass-roots: Assessments are then driven by faculty (i.e., bottom-up) who then coordinate with administrators who already "buy in."

Communication: is established among stakeholders, focus groups, surveys, etc., and is used to define objectives, goals and processes.

Emphasis on student learning: Evaluation of student learning styles exists, and feedback is sought to better meet student needs.

Expanded evaluation tools: Non-traditional means of evaluation are used, including

portfolios.

At WPUNJ today we can see many of these factors in place, while we work towards the incorporation of others. We are seeing the creation of student learning outcome objectives (SLOO'S) for every course we offer. The University is committing resources to meeting assessment needs through the appointment of College Assessment Coordinators who will work with departmental representatives to ensure an ongoing focus on assessment at a grass-roots level.

As we progress towards the implementation of a productive culture of assessment, the Faculty Senate's Assessment Committee is available as a resource to all faculty.

College Assessment Coordinators

Pixy Ferris	College of Arts and Communication
Susan Godar	College of Business
Maria Villar	College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Virginia Overdorf	College of Science and Health
Juan Rosario	College of Education

Self-Study Report for Campus Review

A first draft of the University's Middle States Self-Study Report will be widely distributed across campus this month for feedback. The document will be based on reports submitted in January by ten task groups of faculty and staff who met throughout the Fall 1999 semester. The full report was edited and organized under the direction of the University's Middle States Steering Committee.

You will be able to access the report via the University's Middle States web site at ww2.wpunj.edu/msa/default.htm. We encourage you to provide suggestions and feedback. The site provides a forum for discussion of the self-study findings. You may also choose to e-mail your responses to the Steering Committee at midstsc@wpunj.edu. The Steering Committee will consider the feedback from the campus community in revising the draft report and preparing the final copy.

Dr. Anthoy F. Ceddia, President of Shippensburg University (PA), will chair the Middle States team scheduled to visit William Paterson in Spring 2001. Ceddia will conduct a preliminary visit to the University on October 17 and 18.

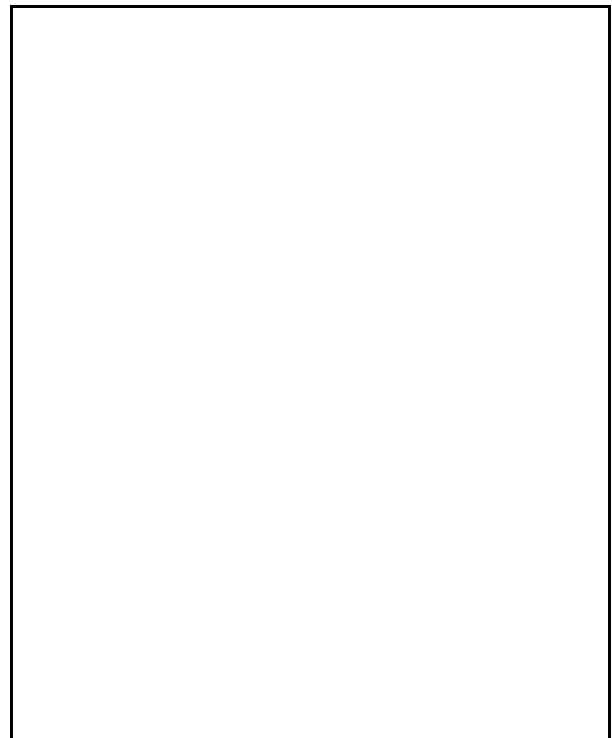
WPU Attendees at the AAHE Conference

This year's American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) Assessment conference, held in Charlotte, North Carolina in June, was attended by a team from William Paterson University. Attendees included Assessment Council members Judy Matthew and Pixy Ferris, Faculty Senate Chair Virginia Overdorf, OPRE Assistant Director Christopher Hourigan, Assistant Deans Bruce Gulbranson and Curt Stiles, and Coordinator of Middle States Accreditation and Outcomes Assessment, Lekha Keister. The conference theme was "Rising Expectations," with four tracks: teaching and learning, institutional effectiveness,

program quality, and excellence in assessment practices. We look forward to seeing ongoing contributions to this newsletter from attendees, reflecting their experiences.

Assessment Awards And Assessment Development Awards

Applications are currently being accepted for the Eleventh Round of Assessment Awards and Assessment Development Awards. Endowed by restricted, designated funds, grants of \$500 or partial overload credit will be made to successful applicants who wish either to learn more about assessment in their particular discipline or area, institute an assessment project, or further develop one already in progress. Interested faculty or staff can obtain application forms with all the details from Pixy Ferris (x3338). Deadline for submission is November 1, 2000. No applications will be considered after that date.



Credo

Assessment Matters has a simple but elegant credo. Every bit of the content, always, will be devoted to WPUNJ's attempts to answer three fundamental questions: 1) What should students know? 2) How well are they learning? 3) How do we know that? If we, as a learning community, cannot answer these questions, nothing else matters.

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Upcoming Conferences

Conference: Course Embedded Assessment Institute

Date: October 19-21

Place: King's College, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania

Conference: The 2000 Assessment Institute

Date: November 5-7

Place: Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, Indiana

Conference: The Assessment Institute

Date: November 9-11

Place: National Center on Post-Secondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

If you are planning to attend, please contact Pixy Ferris (x3338), Chair of the Assessment Committee. Assessment funds earmarked for conferences would be available to cover the expense.

Faculty Assessment by Christopher Hourigan

Faculty are at the heart of higher education. Thus, providing them with *meaningful* feedback on their performance is critical to the continued success of colleges and universities.

Peter Seldin and Thomas Angelo, experts in the field of faculty assessment, remind us that faculty work is complex and influences a wide array of campus constituencies; students, faculty peers and administrators, all have a stake in the quality of an individual faculty member's work. Accordingly, it is important that all of these groups act as sources of information for assessment. Moreover, no single assessment tool can fully capture a faculty member's accomplishments; hence, a **Guidelines for Assessing and Improving Student Learning**
by Lekha Keister

number of tools such as self-ratings, student ratings, peer/administrator observations, videotaping, and portfolios should be employed. While each of these techniques has its shortcomings, they create a richer, more complete portrait of the faculty member when used together.

Seldin and Angelo also emphasize that the feedback faculty receive from these various assessment sources is most useful when it is formative as well as summative. The distinction between summative and formative assessment is an important one; summative assessment answers the question "*how well did it go?*" while formative assessment answers the question "*how well is it going and how can it be better?*" An example of a widely used "summative" assessment technique is the familiar course evaluation forms that students complete at the end of the semester; these forms are used to gather data that faculty see only after they have completed teaching their course. Although they provide information that faculty might use in preparing future courses, conventional course evaluations do not offer feedback that faculty can immediately use to improve their teaching and enhance the learning of their current students. Seldin and Angelo recommend that such summative techniques be supplemented with more formative assessment strategies, such as mid-term student evaluations of teaching, that give instructors information they can use to improve student learning while there is still time to do so in a given semester.

This article is based on the AAHE Assessment Conference 2000 presentation, "Assessing and Evaluating Faculty: When Will We Ever Learn To Use What We Know?" by Peter Seldin and Thomas Angelo

How do we ensure that students achieve learning outcomes that we have set out for them in individual courses? What are the

ways by which faculty can involve students in the assessment process in order to improve their learning? Here are some answers and practical tips gleaned from a presentation at the AAHE Assessment Conference 2000 by Thomas Angelo, Director of the School for New Learning Assessment Center, DePaul University, Chicago, IL.

*Assessment is about asking, not assuming.

*To get the desired results from students, you have to base your assessment on explicit, positive, reasonable goals.

*Student goals tend to be the following: to get through college in four years, get a degree, get a particular job. These goals will continue to be a priority for students. As an educator, you need to develop intrinsic goals in students.

*Tell students you know about their career goals. Ask: *But what do you want to learn in this class?*

*The next step is to get them to understand what you want them to learn. Set and maintain realistically high, personally meaningful expectations and goals. You may want to tailor your course to meet some of their interests and needs, if appropriate.

*Take time to discuss with your colleagues what the student goals should be in your course.

*To promote learning, start with something that students know or are familiar with and then proceed to what they do not know. We learn by making connections between prior knowledge and new information.

*With adults, the biggest hindrance to learning is not usually lack of knowledge but incorrect or partial prior knowledge and beliefs. We are generally reluctant to give up or change prior knowledge or beliefs.

You need assessment (background knowledge probe) to determine their values, beliefs, preconceptions and prior knowledge.

*Provide, receive, and make use of regular, timely and specific feedback.

*Recognize and stretch students' present learning styles, preferences, strategies, and levels of development.

*Seek and find connections to and real-world applications of what they are learning.

*Use grading rubrics to be as objective as possible in the grading of course work.

Assessment Matters is published by the Assessment Committee of the WPUNJ Faculty Senate. Co-editors: Pixy (Sharmila) Ferris and Lekha Keister. We welcome commentary, news articles, and letters to the editor. Please address them to Pixy Ferris at Hobart 204 or to Lekha Keister at OPRE, College Hall.