



ASSESSMENT NEWS

UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS AT
SPRINGFIELD

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Take a Second Look

Grading assignments is the bane of most instructors. We continue to do it, however, for a number of reasons: it is a way to keep students engaged and motivated, it is a way to verify what instructors think they already know about their students' knowledge and skills, and for some instructors it is a part of tradition along the lines of "I had to do it, so you have to do it too."

But grading can do much more. By using what we already do—grade assignments—and taking a second look at the grades with a different purpose in mind, we can assess not only our students' strengths and weaknesses in the knowledge and skills we think they should have, but also assess the curriculum or even an individual course.

All professors have some ideas about what they want their students to be able to do.

Some of those ideas may be quite explicit, while others may not be. "Able to write a coherent, 15-page paper in the

proper format using valid and important references" may be an admirable goal, but it is pretty general. What constitutes coherence? Will students know what "valid" and "important" mean? How able is able, i.e., what level of quality satisfies the criterion? How can we measure that level of quality?

Besides making more explicit our criteria for student performance, taking a second look can help bring those unconsciously held ideals to consciousness so that they can be used to improve a course, a sequence of courses, or a whole curriculum.

A second look may also reveal new, different, and appropriate ways to deliver the curriculum. The result is an improved learning and teaching experience.

To make explicit our criteria for student performance, *primary trait analysis* (PTA) is commonly used. PTA is often called by other names like *evaluation checklist*. Primary



traits are the *goals* or *learning objectives* we have for our students. *Rubrics* state the criteria for meeting learning objectives.

For an example of a primary trait analysis of a scientific paper, check out <http://www.siu.edu/~deder/assess/cats/rubex.html>.

For another example of an assignment and grading criteria, go to <http://www.siu.edu/~deder/lrncom4.html> and be sure to scroll down and click on Assessment and Evaluation Form for an example of rubrics used for the assignment.

Principles of Assessment at UIS

To encourage excellence in teaching and improvement in student learning, the University of Illinois at Springfield is committed to the systematic assessment of student academic achievement, which will adhere to the following principles:

1. The assessment process will be made meaningful for students.

2. Programs will be free to choose the assessment techniques that best suit the pro-

grams' goals and their students' needs.

3. Programs will be encouraged and supported in their efforts to create innovative assessment techniques.

4. Assessment will be used for curricular improvement and will not be used as a gate into or out of the university.

5. External reporting of institution-wide assessment information will emphasize descriptions of as-

essment procedures and curricular changes resulting from the assessment results.

6. Assessment data will be used to facilitate student, program, college, and university development, not to make comparative judgments of the effectiveness of these entities.

7. Assessment data will not be used for faculty evaluation.

8. Assessment will include external perceptions of UIS education.

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The purpose of assessment is to encourage excellence in teaching and improvement in student learning.

Assessment Workshop a Success



Professor Doug Eder, Director of Undergraduate Assessment and Program Review at SIU-E

Dr. Doug Eder, a nationally recognized expert on assessment, led a workshop November 12, 2002 on Primary Trait Analysis, a conceptual model for improving grading and for providing data that departments can use for assessment of learning outcomes.

Department assessment liaisons joined members of the Assessment Task Force to help advance the campus' effort to systematically assess our students' learning, both to improve curricula and to communicate with external audiences. (For information about the Assessment Task Force see <http://www.uis.edu/academicplanning/atfindex.htm>.)

Twenty-seven people attended Eder's articulate and meaningful presentation, with good representation from not only the assessment liaisons but

also a dean and faculty members not associated with the task force. That representation illustrates our campus' collective need to understand assessment of learning outcomes.

During the workshop, Karen Moranski, Associate Director of Capital Scholars and Associate Professor of English, presented the Capital Scholars approach to evaluating writing assignments, an approach that uses primary trait analysis (see "Take a Second Look" on page 1).

The approach, one that parallels that used by Eder, allows instructors to grade assignments according to a rigorous rubric (or set of criteria). The approach goes beyond grading, however, to provide also for collection of data usable for assessment of skills. Eder noted that while no approach is perfect, he urged attendees not

to sacrifice the good in an attempt to achieve the perfect.

Kyle Weir, Assistant Professor of Human Development Counseling, said that he felt the workshop was "a very valuable experience." The task force would like to thank Dr. Moranski for organizing the workshop so quickly. More workshops will be forthcoming. For more information on and samples of Dr. Eder's work on assessment, see <http://www.siu.edu/~deder/assess/>.

By bringing to consciousness our "unconsciously held ideals...they can be used to improve a course, a sequence of courses, or a whole curriculum."
—Doug Eder

Performance Verbs: Aids to that Second Look

When laying out criteria for what you want students to be able to do, it helps to be able to frame them in terms of performance verbs that fit each of the desired outcomes. Below is a list of possible outcomes along with some associated verbs that describe abilities and proficiencies. (See "Take a Second Look," p. 1.)

Remembering/Knowledge: defines, describes, identifies, labels, lists, matches, names, outlines, reproduces, selects, states

Comprehension: converts, distinguishes, estimates, ex-

plains, extends, generalizes, gives examples, infers, paraphrases, predicts, rewrites, summarizes

Application: applies, changes, computes, demonstrates, discovers, employs, manipulates, modifies, operates, predicts, prepares, produces, relates, shows, solves, uses

Analysis: breaks down, classifies, diagrams, differentiates, discriminates, distinguishes,

identifies, illustrates, infers, outlines, points out, relates, selects, separates, subdivides

Performance verbs describe abilities and proficiencies

Synthesis/Design: assembles, categorizes, combines, compiles, composes, creates, devises, designs, explains, generates, modifies, organizes, plans, produces, puts together, revises, rewrites, summarizes, writes

Evaluation: appraises, assesses, compares, concludes,

contrasts, describes, discriminates, evaluates, explains, justifies, interprets, relates, summarizes, supports

The list is borrowed from one compiled by the UIS Management Information Systems Department as part of its assessment effort. It is based on a modified version of Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives:

Bloom, B.S. (ed.) (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals: Handbook I, cognitive domain. New York: Longmans.

Portfolios as Assessment Tools

Portfolios, electronic and paper, were the focus at a well-attended workshop on assessment held on April 3. Facilitated by Kyle Weir, Assistant Professor of Human Development Counseling, the presentations included guest speakers from Illinois State University and UIS discussing the strengths and weaknesses of portfolios as assessment tools.

According to Wendy Troxel, Director of ISU's University Assessment Office, assessment analyzes the gap between what we want our students to know and be able to do and what they actually know and can do.

That gap is measurable in terms of the difference between abilities and knowledge at the beginning and end of a course or a degree program.

In the traditional grading system, we measure the gap in holistic and largely impressionistic terms. Assessment, as opposed to grading, breaks down our goals for the students, the course, and the curriculum into explicit sets of desired outcomes.

Troxel outlined some questions that help lead to statements of intended outcomes: What do you want to know about what your students have accomplished? What do you want the students to know about their own performance? What do you want the cognitive and performance components of the final product to be?

"...student portfolios [are] showcases for students' best work ...and for students' growth."

—Wendy Troxel

What types of evidence will you expect and accept? What constitutes "success" and how will you know it when you see it?

She also outlined possible uses for student portfolios as showcases for students' best work as chosen by the students, for the students' best work as

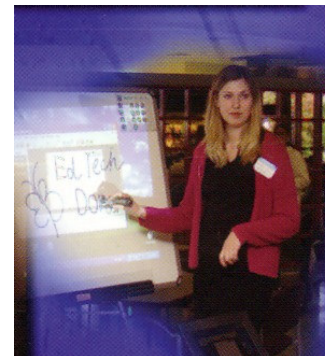
chosen by the teacher, for the students' interests, and for students' growth.

Portfolios may also be sources of evidence or documentation of self-assessment and self-adjustment, enabling professional assessment of student performance; student work for documentation and archiving; or a constantly changing sample of student work reflecting change over time and change according to application.

Troxel cautioned against biting off too much at first—portfolios cannot do or be everything, and attempting too much too early will overload everyone concerned.

Troxel noted that another source of the failure of a portfolio assessment system generally stems from failure to envision the use of the portfolio.

Some issues to consider when designing a portfolio assessment system are scope, i.e., how much the portfolio should include; the time that will be required of students to assemble it and the instructors to



Electronic portfolios may even include clips of students introducing and explaining their work

evaluate it; its usefulness for assessing student outcomes and as sources of information relatable to the course or curriculum; challenges that might be encountered in establishing a portfolio system; barriers that will need to be overcome for the program to be successful; and ethical considerations to ensure fairness and protect both students and faculty.

About the Assessment Task Force

In fall 2001, Provost Cheney established the Assessment Task Force to review UIS' experience with assessment of baccalaureate skills, assessment of general education, assessment of graduate education, and assessment in the major.

The task force will recommend policy and structural changes to make assessment more useful to the campus, both for improvement of curricula and for communication with external audiences.

He appointed Harry Berman, associate vice chancellor for academic planning, and Bill Bloemer, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, as co-chairs.

Members were selected from the four colleges, the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Assessment Office, and Student Affairs.

The members are Leanne Brecklin (CRJ), Eric Fisher (CHE), Karen Kirkendall, (PSY), Sharron LaFollette (ENS), Kortney Leatherwood

(Assessment Office), Martin Martsch (SWK), Chris Miller (Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs), Karen Moranski (ENG and Capital Scholars), Mark Puulik (BUS), Judy Shipp (Counseling Center), Kyle Weir (HDC), and Doug Woken (CTL).

The first meeting was held on November 30, 2001, during which the charge to the task force was approved.

Provost Cheney's charge reads: "The task force will review UIS' experience with

assessment of baccalaureate skills, assessment of general education, assessment of graduate education, and assessment in the major. The task force will recommend policy and structural changes to make assessment more useful to the campus, both for improvement of curricula and for communication with external audiences."

Check out our web site: <http://www.uis.edu/academicplanning/atfindex.htm>.



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<http://www.uis.edu/academicplanning/atfindex.htm>

Assessment Liaisons

Assessment liaisons serve as leaders and resources for faculty in the move to improve assessment at UIS and its usefulness. Here are the names of the liaisons, listed by college:

College of Business and Management: John Palmer (MBA), Mark Puclik (BUS and MGT), Carol Jessup (ACC), Apiwan Born (MIS), Baker Siddiquee (ECO)

College of Education and Human Services: Allan Cook (TEP), Martin Martsch (SWK), Dan Matthews (EDL), Carol Rankin (HMS), Kyle Weir (HDC)

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences: Heather Bailey (HIS), Gary Butler (BIO), Kamyar Dezhgosha (CSC),

Eric Fisher (CHE), Paula Garrott (CLS), Ron Havens (PSY), Jennifer Haytock (ENG), Ted Matula (COM), Holly McCracken (Online Programs), Karen Moranski (Capital Scholars), Rosina Neginsky (INO/LIS), Jonathan Perkins (ART), Hammed Shahidian (SOA), Chung-Hsien Sung (MAT), Doug Woken (Assessment Office and CTL)

College of Public Affairs and Administration: Leanne Brecklin (CRJ), Beverly Bunch (DPA), Kathryn Eisehart (LES), Remi Imeokparia (MPH), Sharron LaFollette (ENS), Calvin Mouw (POS), Anthony Sisneros (MPA), Charlie Wheeler (PAR)

Baccalaureate Skills at UIS

In its original assessment plan, SSU identified five baccalaureate skills deemed essential at the campus level:

- Writing
- Reading
- Quantitative skills
- Critical thinking
- Library skills

In spring 2003 the Assessment Task Force expanded the list above to include these additional abilities:

- Technological literacy
- Oral communication skills
- Cooperative interpersonal skills

In its initial conception, the assessment of baccalaureate skills involved testing each student at entrance and exit in sessions scheduled specifically for that purpose.

Times change and we learn.

We now believe that embedded assessment will be necessary to provide the type of student engagement required for meaningful results.

We see capstone courses as one logical vehicle and are encouraged that such courses are becoming increasing prevalent among our majors.

We anticipate that portfolios, rather than testing, will become the primary focus of baccalaureate skills assessment.

Structuring assignments across different disciplines and developing appropriate rubrics for evaluation are the central challenge we face now.

Focus groups provided useful information about student perceptions of the institution and its curriculum, and they remain the lone "external"

assessment activity that merits continuation.

We also recognize that the list of eight "core" baccalaureate skills provides many opportunities for creative and effective streamlining. The original notion that the work of each individual student be evaluated for purposes of assessment was an unnecessary extravagance. We now realize that appropriate sampling can still provide the information desired and should be done.

While exit remains the focus of our baccalaureate assessment, attention to student skills at significant transition points is also appropriate, especially as we begin the lower division. At the moment, those transition points appear to be transfer or achievement of

junior standing (mid career) and entrance into the lower division.

Effective measures should provide the information required for longitudinal studies that inform retention and other activities.



Technological literacy has been added to the list of essential baccalaureate-level skills.