Juggling, Dogs, and Assessment

Should assessment be as difficult and time consuming as juggling dogs? Doug Eder, Associate Professor of Biological Sciences and Director of Undergraduate Assessment and Program Review at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville (SIUE), will answer this question on February 7th. He will present two workshops at the Campus Life Building in Room 100 which will help faculty and staff with assessment.

“Juggling, Dogs, and Assessment: The importance of feedback, critical thinking, and punctuation,” is scheduled from 8:30 am to noon. This interactive workshop aims to use good thinking, humor, and feedback to outline the power of good assessment. This session for all faculty and support staff incorporates assessment for internal improvement as well as for accountability to external agencies.

“General Education, Assessment, and the Scholarship of Teaching: Having it all and doing some of it while seeming to do nothing” is scheduled from 1 to 4:30 pm. This workshop addresses several assessment questions related to general education.

No fee is necessary, but registration with Faculty Development (753-2795) is required by January 31.

Dr. Eder has consulted on assessment with almost 70 U.S. institutions of higher learning, and published refereed articles on the subject of authentic assessment. SIUE’s assessment program was cited in November 1998 by the AASCU as a “best practice” site for academic quality assurance.
Junior Level Writing:
A Win-Win Project

Be a part of a win-win project!
The 2003 Junior Level Writing Project is set to kick off this spring. According to Craig Barnard, this will be the 5th year for the project at NIU. “We have had a tremendous response from NIU faculty, and are looking for the same level of participation this year.”

Would you like to have information about the writing ability of students enrolled in your department’s major or minor? It only takes one class period for your students to take the writing essay test. You should consider participating if you have a class consisting of primarily upper level students, especially juniors. Everyone in class may participate, but the primary target of the assessment is college juniors. All of the materials will be sent to participating instructors in mid-March, and instructors choose a date between March 17 – 28 for the assessment to occur.

What happens to the results? After the materials are collected, trained readers from our faculty will evaluate them, and the results will be sent to students, participating faculty, and the appropriate administrative chairs and deans. The project always generates rich qualitative findings about students’ chosen professions, as well as summary that quantitatively assesses the degree to which students meet the criteria for excellence in writing.

You have my attention, how do I find out more? Contact Assessment Services at 753-8659 or email Craig Barnard, University Assessment Coordinator at barnard@niu.edu.

Deadline to register is February 7!

Profile: Registration and Records

At the January 17 meeting of the University Assessment Panel, Director Don Larson and Associate Director Sheri Kallembach of Registration and Records discussed their approach to assessing their unit’s student services.

“We use a ‘rolling’ five-year strategic plan that is updated annually,” said Sheri. “We set out to assess everything that Registration and Records does.

“A key factor is involving absolutely everyone in the process. Great ideas come from everybody.”

This strategic plan informs Registration and Records’ Assessment Plan, which begins with a set of well-articulated desired outcomes. Multiple measures are in place to assess the attainment of each outcome. For example, objective number one is to “Provide student services that enhance the educational experience.” Surveys, a suggestion box, and measures of attendance and participation at key events are just some of the ways that R&R seeks to ascertain that it does what it says it will do.

Each method is tied to a specific timeline, and specific personnel are designated to ensure that it is carried out on time.

Finally, the feedback loop is closed by sharing the data and using it to improve operations. For example, findings from recent faculty surveys are helping to formulate a proposal for a new Academic Information System.

Don emphasizes, “We are trying to serve the university that will exist down the road as well as the university of today.”
Beyond Confusion: An Assessment Glossary

Higher education lacks a common vocabulary about assessment; and individuals use terms in mutating ways to refer to varying levels of analysis. Some interpretations imply external oversight or control, an unpleasant idea for most college faculty. Miscommunication and mistrust result from this confused language and are likely to interfere with developing the kind of useful value added assessment proposed by Benjamin, Hersh, and Klein.

To shine a light, as Marc Chun so eloquently puts it, in the darkness and 'where we should be looking,' this 'reality check' attempts to provide such a common vocabulary for the concepts used or implied in the preceding articles. Herewith, a glossary of educational assessment terms, within the college context and focusing on student learning.

Value Added — the increase in learning that occurs during a course, program, or undergraduate education. Can either focus on the individual student (how much better a student can write, for example, at the end than at the beginning) or on a cohort of students (whether senior papers demonstrate more sophisticated writing skills-in the aggregate-than freshmen papers). Requires a baseline measurement for comparison.

Standards — set a level of accomplishment all students are expected to meet or exceed. Standards do not necessarily imply high quality learning; sometimes the level is a lowest common denominator. Nor do they imply complete standardization in a program; a common minimum level could be achieved by multiple pathways and demonstrated in various ways.

Examples: carrying on a conversation about daily activities in a foreign language using correct grammar and comprehensible pronunciation; achieving a certain score on a standardized test.

— Dr. Andrea Leskes, Vice President for Education and Quality Initiatives of the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

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“A portfolio can be an excellent tool for self-assessment.”

Two Ways to Use Your Portfolio

Doug Boughton, Professor in the School of Art, had these words to say about the confusion over portfolio use.

“Students and faculty alike often think of the portfolio as a way to showcase one’s best possible work, and that’s true,” he said.

“A concise portfolio can demonstrate one’s skill and creativity to many a potential employer.

“But a portfolio can also be an excellent tool for self-assessment. A student of virtually any subject can keep on file selected work samples of both finished pieces and experiments over a period of time. A body of work kept each semester for two or more years can readily show the rate and quality of progress.

Essentially a working portfolio, which is a collection of all work over time that includes both good work and ‘thinking pieces’ can be edited to become the showcase portfolio.”

Dr. Boughton has chaired the Research and Assessment Committee, a subgroup of the Committee on Initial Teacher Certification (CITC) for two years.
Need Help?

People to call at NIU include:

- **Craig Barnard**, Assessment Coordinator 753-7120
- **Sherry Wisdom**, Assessment Secretary 753-8659
- **Donna Askins**, Editor-in-Chief of *Toolkit* 753-0816

Help is also available in the form of books such as *Assessing Student Competence in Accredited Disciplines: Pioneering Approaches to Assessment in Higher Education* by Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta (Editors). The first two chapters Assessing Competence in Higher Education and Implementing Effective Assessment. Chapters 3-10 address assessment applications in a variety of disciplines: Teacher Education, Pharmacy, Nursing, Social Work Education, Business, Computer Science, Engineering and the Visual Arts. Finally, the book wraps up with essays on accredited programs and disciplines, and touches on British assessment experiences.

For those colleges that have accredited programs, a copy is available in the associate dean’s office.

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**FEBRUARY**

- **3**: DEADLINE to submit proposals for Portfolio Workshop and Capstone Course Development stipends.
- **7**: DEADLINE to register for Junior Level Writing Project.

**MARCH**

- **21st**: 13-16: Higher Learning Commission Annual Meeting

**APRIL**

- **18th**: DEADLINE to submit proposals for Portfolio Workshop and Capstone Course Development stipends.

The Office of Assessment Services assists NIU academic programs, learning centers and student services units in developing their assessment plans. Its mission statement focuses on excellence and continuous quality improvement.