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SHARPEN YOUR PENCIL

A Critical Thinking Rubric

This resource is featured on the Assessment page of the website of Association of American Colleges and Universities. Assessment of each part is guided by descriptions of what would represent scant and substantially-developed skill in the area. Edited here for length, the entire rubric and its background information may be viewed at http://wsuctproject.wsu.edu/ctr.htm.

1) Identifies and summarizes the problem/question at issue (and/or the source's position).
2) Identifies and presents the STUDENT'S OWN hypothesis, perspective and position as it is important to the analysis of the issue.
3) Identifies and considers OTHER salient perspectives and positions that are important to the analysis.
4) Identifies and assesses the key assumptions.
5) Identifies and assesses the quality of supporting data/evidence and provides additional data/evidence related to the issue.
6) Identifies and considers the influence of the context * on the issue.
7) Identifies and assesses conclusions, implications and consequences.

*Contexts for consideration:
- Cultural/Social: Group, national, ethnic behavior/attitude.
- Scientific: Conceptual, basic science, scientific method.
- Educational: Schooling, formal training.
- Economic: Trade, business concerns costs.
- Technological: Applied science, engineering.
- Ethical: Values.
- Political: Organizational or governmental.
- Personal Experience: Personal observation, informal character.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities will host two assessment conferences this coming year. Click either link for additional information.

- General Education and Outcomes that Matter in a Changing World Phoenix, AZ – March 9-11, 2006
New Assessment Coordinator

Carolinda Douglass is the newly appointed Assessment Coordinator in the Office of Assessment Services at NIU. Dr. Douglass holds a Ph.D. in Health Policy Analysis from the RAND Graduate School and Master’s degrees in Public Administration and Gerontology from the University of Southern California. She has the rank of Associate Professor in the School of Allied Health Professions in the College of Health and Human Sciences where she has taught for the past nine years. During that time, she has been responsible for teaching the capstone courses for both the undergraduate and graduate programs in public health. She has served as an active member of her departmental assessment committee. Her primary research interests in assessment are focused on capstone courses and problem-based learning techniques.

Dr. Douglass is on a temporary one-year assignment with the Office of Assessment Services and plans to use that time to provide ongoing outreach and technical support to members of the NIU community. Please feel free to contact her office at (815) 753-8659 or e-mail at cdoug@niu.edu.

Capstone Course Rubrics Developed

In June of this year, the University Assessment Panel awarded stipends to two Department of Literacy Education faculty for their work on the capstone course LTCY 586: Internship in Literacy Education. Vice Provost Virginia Cassidy congratulated Drs. Susan L’Allier and Francine Falk-Ross, saying, “The work you did to develop the rubrics for the various aspects of the course and its requirements is exemplary.”

Faculty around NIU may find several of the rubrics, such as that for the Action Research assignment, to have applicability beyond literacy education. The Action Research rubric measures a student’s ability to: identify a local need or question; interview professionals with different perspectives; research and present the topic to the appropriate professional audience; collect and analyze feedback from the audience; and publish the results accordingly. The Personal Professional Development Rubric provides a context in which faculty can observe a student’s ability to: participate in professional development activities such as conference participation; use multiple indicators to judge her/his own professional growth; and collect and organize related artifacts. Several other rubrics have broad applicability as well. All are posted online at http://www.cedu.niu.edu/ltcy/Courses/CrsOutlines.htm; click on LTCY 586. Internship in Literacy Education.

In addition to developing an exemplary set of rubrics, Drs. L’Allier and Falk-Ross cite a second benefit: that of intense, dynamic faculty discussion. Thirdly, “We made the assessment process very clear, very visible, to the International Reading Association,” they stated. Use of these or similar rubrics might help other departments gain the same advantage.
The 2005 Assessment Institute

September 30 is the deadline to register for the 2005 Assessment Institute. Hosted by Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), the Institute takes place October 23-October 25 at University Conference Center and Hotel in Indianapolis, Indiana.

The pre-institute on October 23 will include topics such as electronic portfolios, assessment practical steps, capstone experiences, assessing administrative and support areas, and program review as a value-added assessment activity. The Best Practices Fair will feature assessment instruments, methods and approaches from test developers and practitioners in higher education.

Sessions are available with national leaders with special tracks for accreditation, assessment methods, community colleges, student affairs, with an emphasize this year on engineering and engineering technology fields. Also available will be concurrent workshops with in-depth sessions with leaders of successful assessment initiatives. See the Institute website for more details.

PROFILES IN ASSESSMENT
Lemuel Watson, Chair of Counseling, Adult, and Higher Education

In fall of 2003, Lemuel Watson became the chair of the Department of Counseling, Adult, and Higher Education in the College of Education. A Fulbright award enabled him to serve a three-month appointment at the National Center for Postsecondary Education at Belarussian State University in Belarus. He has also taught in the Malcolm X Adult Education program. His research interests include examining institutions of higher education and how their structures, practices and policies affect learning, development and educational outcomes of students, especially historically under-represented students.

Click either picture to view a few minutes of Dr. Watson discussing his views on assessment.

Download Windows Media Player for free.
Assessment Key to Developing Student Programs

The rapidly growing Asian-American student population at Northern Illinois University, about 6% of the student body, will be the focus of several new assessment initiatives conducted by the Division of Student Affairs this year.

The Asian American Center, a department within the Division of Student Affairs, has launched a pilot Peer Mentoring Program and Leadership Development Seminar Series to serve its culturally diverse group that is comprised of more than 12 Asian ethnicities. Assessment instruments designed to measure student learning outcomes, leadership development, and academic and social engagement will be used to evaluate the impact of the new programs.

“We’ve designed several very brief pre-test/post-test tools to measure students’ learning outcomes based on their engagement with their peer mentors, and their participation in each of the five Leadership Series seminars,” said Michelle Bringas, director of the Center. “Our goal in assessing the Leadership Series, which is based on lessons from the popular Lord of the Rings trilogy, is to measure whether the seminars help our students gain and apply specific skills that we know will enhance their academic and social experiences at Northern.”

Formal observations, online surveys, as well as pre-test/post-test vehicles will be used to assess student learning and personal development outcomes related to the Peer Mentoring program, which in its pilot year has matched 18 experienced NIU students with 18 entering freshmen.

“These students are really connecting,” said Bringas, whose staff members have hosted three informal events for the group already this year. Assessment results, according to Bringas, will be used to evaluate the feasibility and effect of the new student-centered programs. “We work in an environment that requires ‘valued-added’ analyses, so assessing each of our programs to determine the impact on student learning and development is critical,” Bringas said.

“We owe that to our students—the responsibility of providing valuable experiences, and of continually seeking to improve programs based on reliable assessment data.”

Contributions Solicited!

Contribute to Toolkit’s newest feature, “Sharpen your Pencil: Assessment Tips from the Inside,” or any of our other regular features. We’re looking to share the wisdom that we each develop at home, making the work of assessment more productive. If you’d like material to be considered for inclusion in a future edition of Toolkit, submit a Word document of no more than 300 words as an email attachment to c doug@niu.edu.
Debunking NCATE Myths

The previous issue of *Toolkit* featured the first five debunked NCATE myths. Here are myths #6-10:

**NCATE Myth #6:** There is a magic ratio of faculty members without terminal degrees to faculty members with terminal degrees in the professional education unit that must be met in order to meet the faculty qualification element of Standard 5 at the acceptable level.

**NCATE Reality #6:** There is no magic ratio. Various combinations of faculty members with and without terminal degrees work well, provided that faculty members without terminal degrees have expertise that qualifies them for their assignments. The quality of the programs offered as measured by candidate learning is most important.

**NCATE Myth #7:** There is a magic ratio of part-time to full-time faculty members in the professional education unit that must be met in order to meet personnel element at the acceptable level.

**NCATE Reality #7:** There is no magic ratio. Various combinations of full and part-time faculty members work well and are possible in different institutional contexts. Standard 6 requires that part-time personnel are fully integrated into the work of the unit to ensure program coherence and integrity. The quality of the programs offered as measured by candidate learning is most important.

**NCATE Myth #8:** There is an NCATE curriculum vitae format.

**NCATE Reality #8:** There is no NCATE curriculum vitae format. In the past, NCATE had such a requirement but no longer does. Institutions can use whatever format they choose. BOE teams actually prefer faculty information in charts and tables. The faculty table used for program reports may be a helpful way to highlight the qualifications and accomplishments of faculty.

**NCATE Myth #9:** Units are expected to demonstrate their candidates’ impact on student learning using P-12 student work or P-12 standardized test scores.

**NCATE Reality #9:** NCATE does not expect units to collect P-12 student work or P-12 standardized test scores. The element in Standard 1 on student learning requires units to summarize data demonstrating that candidates to know about, create and use appropriate and effective assessments when working with students. The element requires units to develop candidate assessments in which candidates, working with P-12 students, judge prior learning, plan and teach, assess, analyze, and reflect on student learning.

**NCATE Myth #10:** Units must hire a consultant to get through NCATE.

**NCATE Reality #10:** Hiring a consultant is not a condition of NCATE accreditation. NCATE’s website includes all of the information any unit needs to know in order to become accredited. The information on the website includes an accreditation handbook, timelines, training modules which reveal what examiners know and are expected to do, templates, and presentations given by NCATE staff.

Visit [www.ncate.org](http://www.ncate.org) for further information.
DID YOU KNOW?

Graduate Alumni Survey Results

The Office of Assessment Services conducted NIU’s 2003 Graduate Degree Recipient Alumni Survey one year after the group’s graduation. Respondents indicated …

- they are currently employed graduate (87%)
- their degree major is related to their current job (93%)
- they had a positive attitude toward their degree major (95%)
- the amount of time it took to complete their degree was reasonable (97%)

Specifically, Graduate Alumni indicated their agreement…

- that the quality of their interactions with other students at NIU was good (95%)
- that the quality of their interactions with administrative personnel at NIU was good (75%)
- that if they had the decision to make over again, they would still pursue a graduate degree (96%)
- that faculty were responsive to their personal needs and concerns (92%)
- that faculty were interested and helpful in providing information and advice about further graduate study and/or employment opportunity (82%)
- Finally, over 90% of respondents indicated they would recommend NIU to family and friends, with over 95% indicating a positive attitude toward NIU.

FROM THE HIGHER LEARNING COMMISSION

Criterion One: Mission and Integrity

New Higher Learning Commission accreditation criteria became effective January, 2005. Some excerpts from criterion one are:

The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students. Evidence for this criteria includes:

- The organization’s mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization’s commitments.
- In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
- Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.
- The organization’s governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.
- The organization upholds and protects its integrity.

The full text may be viewed at:
http://www.ncahigherlearningcommission.org/download/PolicyBookJan05.pdf