OAS Calls for Faculty Participation

The Office of Assessment Services (OAS) announces a call for proposals. The **Capstone Course Development Proposal** provides an opportunity for programs to develop or refine their capstone courses for assessment purposes. Stipends are available to faculty and staff who are interested in developing or redesigning a culminating experience within a degree program. Faculty involved in a funded Capstone Course Development Proposal will receive a $1,500 stipend. Proposals are due February 5, 2007.

The OAS is also calling for faculty to participate in the **University Writing Project**. The project provides valuable information on the writing skills of NIU’s undergraduate students. Faculty participants simply submit anonymous copies of student assignments. The OAS is looking for participation from all colleges in the University Writing Project this year. Because the project uses course assignments that already exist, there is no need for faculty to assign extra work or dedicate class time to be involved in this initiative. Faculty volunteers are needed as soon as possible!

Interested parties should contact Carolinda Douglass, Assessment Coordinator, at 753-7120 or visit www.niu.edu/assessment.
David Changnon is an atmospheric scientist specializing in climatological studies in the Department of Geography at Northern Illinois University. His involvement with assessment began during a term on NIU’s General Education Committee (GEC). Understanding phrases such as “student learning objectives,” “course-level assessment tools,” and “measurable outcomes” was part of his baptism into assessment. As his interest in assessment grew, he and others on the GEC developed practical tools to help others integrate innovative assessment practices into their courses. Academic assessment expectations have risen over the past decade, and Changnon has learned the importance of “closing the assessment loop.” His recent involvement on the University Assessment Panel has provided him with further insight into this evolving issue, an issue that will continue to impact higher education at three levels: courses, programs, and universities.

Changnon’s major expertise rests in developing climatological information and models for use by weather-sensitive decision makers in agriculture, utilities, insurance, and transportation. He has developed an innovative new “education-to-career” program to train students and simultaneously solve climatological problems facing government and private industry. His service to the discipline includes committee work within scientific societies, as well as participation in a National Research Council (NRC) Panel.

Click either photograph to watch a brief interview with Professor Changnon. The tools he mentions are web-posted for your use. He will also discuss peer assessment with those looking to implement this methodology.
In Toolkit’s video interview this month, David Changnon discusses the importance of self- and peer-assessment. Used together, these two assessment strategies help students gain the ability to make judgments and take responsibility for their own learning. These skills in turn help students develop critical thinking, a foundation for lifelong learning. (For more information about the advantages of peer assessment, please see Toolkit, Volume 3, Issue 3, March 2005).

According to Boud’s 1999 article on peer learning and assessment, effective assessment requires motivation to learn, opportunity for deep learning, and help with the development of skills for the student.

Loaker (2000) identified four skills that are inherent for enhancing self-assessment:
- Observing – report the student’s own behavior within some performance
- Interpreting/analyzing – identify strengths and weaknesses
- Judging – connect criteria and performance
- Planning – identify aspects of the learning approach and maintain them for further development

Juwah (2003) developed a framework for enhancing peer assessment that includes:
- Providing an explicit rationale - explain the rationale of the assessment
- Engaging learners in an authentic learning context
- Involving learners in setting the assessment criteria
- Assessing learning, grade work, and give/receive feedback
- Coaching for effective performance
- Reflecting on the learning and performance

Common tools for these assessment methods are listed below. David Changnon also shares the tools he discusses in PDF format online, and is open to working with colleagues who would like to employ this methodology.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOLS**
- Goal setting – evaluating the progress and motivation of students’ short-term goal
- Guided practice with assessment – an opportunity for students to practice the assessment procedure before they assess their learning
- Portfolios – students are able to demonstrate their progress and effort throughout the learning process

**PEER-ASSESSMENT TOOLS**
- Rating scales – students rating each other on an already set standard of performance (usually a checklist or rubric)
- Peer nominations – members are in charge of a particular task they are nominated for
- Peer ranking – rank ordering the members of the group from best to worst on a set of criteria
Teacher Graduate Assessment Results

For the past two years, the University Office of Teacher Certification (UOTC) has utilized the Teacher Graduate Assessment instrument of the Association of Deans of Public Colleges of Education (IADPCE). The IADPCE has administered this survey to graduates of teacher education programs at each of the Illinois public universities who were in their first year of teaching. The goal of the survey is to examine teacher skills related to Illinois Professional Teaching Standards and Illinois Learning Standards for the purpose of identifying areas of improvement for teacher preparation programs and on-going new teacher professional development needs. In spring 2005, 216 first year teachers replied to the survey and 175 replied in spring 2006. Two years’ worth of weighted data indicate the following:

\textbf{Satisfaction}
- 99% of teacher graduates reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their decision to become a teacher
- 99% of teacher graduates reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their choice of grade level for certification
- 98% of teacher graduates reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their choice of subject area for certification
- 93% of teacher graduates reported being satisfied with their interactions with teacher preparation faculty
- 93% of teacher graduates reported being satisfied with the overall quality of the teacher education program.

\textbf{Knowledge and Practice}
- 97% of teacher graduates reported that they mostly or completely understood teaching as a profession and the standards of professional conduct; 98% reported putting this knowledge into practice most or all of the time
- 96% of teacher graduates reported that they mostly or completely understood the role of a teacher as a reflective practitioner; 90% reported putting this knowledge into practice most or all of the time
- 94% of teacher graduates reported that they mostly or completely understood the Illinois Learning Standards; 90% reported putting this knowledge into practice most or all of the time

The UOTC distributes the data to each teacher education program for faculty review. Faculty then reply to the UOTC about how their programs are modified in light of the findings.
The Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures utilizes several assessment tools in order to ensure that students receive the best education possible. One such tool is the e-portfolio, which all undergraduates declaring majors in French, German, Russian, or Spanish are required to create. The aim of the portfolio is two-fold: (i) to help the department assess the student’s progress over the time the student is at NIU, and thereby assess itself; and (ii) to provide the student with a portfolio that demonstrates progress and current level of proficiency in a foreign language, which is valuable for professional and educational advancement, including entry into graduate school. The satisfactory completion of the portfolio is a departmental requirement for graduation.

Each portfolio artifact must be a clean copy, free of comments, annotations, or grade assigned to it. In addition, each artifact must be accompanied by a reflective statement which considers questions such as:

• Why is this particular work chosen for inclusion in the portfolio?
• How does the work reflect progress in a given course?
• How does the work reflect progress in the language of the student’s major?

Undergraduates learn how to create and maintain a portfolio through a required one-credit-hour portfolio course. Students are responsible for the collection of materials, but are free to consult with any of several professors, including their own instructors, their division coordinator, or the foreign language multimedia instructional consultant.

Portfolio artifacts are reviewed to assess students’ progress in four specific competencies: reading, writing, and speaking the target language, and the culture associated with the language. Faculty utilize rubrics to assess students’ proficiency in each area. The collective results of individual portfolios reflect vital information back to the department as whole. Use of the portfolio thereby supports programmatic assessment.

For additional information, contact Professor Anne L. Birberick.

What goes in a student portfolio?

• audio and video recordings
• papers
• journals
• pictures
• essays
• compositions
• translations
• other creative works
• anything that represents the student as an active foreign language learner
Taking Stock of General Education Assessment

General education has been described as “the core of the undergraduate curriculum for all students, regardless of major,” (Allen, 2006). The Association of American Colleges and Universities has called for general education to “promote deep and lasting learning and prepare students for citizenship, work, and participation in an interconnected world,” (AACU, 2002).

There is no doubt that general education is important, but the assessment thereof can be difficult for a number of reasons. First, outcomes such as “preparation for global citizenship” or “intellectual honesty and integrity” are not easy to measure. Second, such outcomes are generally not the result of a single course experience. They are more likely to be the culmination of a variety of in-class and co-curricular experiences. It is therefore not always clear who is responsible for promoting general education outcomes. In turn, it is hard to know how best to coordinate general education efforts, and to assess progress in this area.

The assessment of general education was a featured track at the October IUPUI Assessment Institute in Indianapolis. One workshop in the track was Strengthening General Education: Assessment Practices That Lead to Authentic Improvement, led by Teresa Flateby of the University of South Florida and Allen Dupont of North Carolina State University. Flateby and Dupont emphasized that when conducting general education assessment, “one size does not fit all.” Assessment of any important component of student learning, particularly one that cuts across so many divisions on a campus, must take into account the unique dimensions of the higher education institution in which it is being conducted. A first step is to examine several critical dimensions, such as:

- Institutional mission and purpose
- Level of institutional “trust” among faculty and staff
- Resources available for assessment, including faculty and staff time and expertise
- General education program structure (e.g., is it a distributive model, core or other type of model?)
- Leadership for assessment (e.g., is there a General Education Committee that oversees general education as NIU has, or is there an office or program devoted to the general education oversight?)
- Culture of assessment on campus (i.e., is it relatively new or more mature; how is assessment being used on campus?)

The assessment of general education is an evolving process that must include representation from both curricular and co-curricular units. The work can be time-consuming and difficult at times but is worth the effort. Taking stock of these dimensions completely and honestly will aid a campus in better serving the general education needs of its students.

References
Assessment Conferences... Lots of ’Em

Looking for an assessment conference?

Try www.assessmentconferences.com. Hosted by PACAT, Inc., this website provides dates, locations, web links, and brief descriptions of upcoming assessment conferences. Selected examples include:

- 26th Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience
  February 16 – 20, 2007
  Addison, TX
- 7th Annual Assessment Conference at Texas A&M: “Building Assessment Capacity: Foundation to Fruition”
  February 22 - 23, 2007
  College Station, TX
- CFMTA/MTNA/RCM Collaborative Conference ’07
  March 23-27, 2007
  Toronto, Ontario
  This music education conference features a day-long event focusing on assessment as a purposeful tool for student progress.

The Higher Learning Commission also offers several upcoming workshops and special events. Workshops fill quickly, so register early.

- Best Practices in Partnering: Developing Capacity
  January 31-February 2, 2007
  Marriott Hickory Ridge Conference Center, Lisle, IL
- Best Practices in Web-based Services for Students: Providing Support for Learning
  February 14-16, 2007
  Marriott Hickory Ridge Conference Center, Lisle, IL
- Making a Difference in Student Learning: Assessment as a Core Strategy
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Questions? Please email the Higher Learning Commission: ms_lists@hlcommission.org

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Your Contribution is Welcome

What assessment methods have worked well for you? What findings have helped you modify your program? Toolkit would love to print your assessment tips or success story! 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 cdoug@niu.edu.

Toolkit is brought to you by the Office of Assessment Services:

Donna Askins, Editor-in-Chief
Carolinda Douglass, Assessment Coordinator
and Ashley, Amy, and Koushik, the Assessment Research Assistants.