2009 Assessment Expo a Success

The Assessment Expo, an annual showcase of best assessment practices at NIU, enjoyed a turnout of 65 people on February 20, 2009.

The Expo is brought to the campus by the University Assessment Panel and Campus Assessment Network each year. It provides a forum for sharing assessment experiences and insights and strengthens collaborative relationships. Such collaboration creates avenues for increasing accountability to external parties, and improves teaching and learning environments for students.

Feedback from the Expo was overwhelmingly positive. Of the 37 participants who filled out a program evaluation form:

- 97% believed the scope of the topics covered was appropriate
- 95% believed their objectives for attending the Expo were met
- 98% believed their participation in the Expo would benefit NIU students
- 97% believed the concepts and techniques in the program were directly applicable to their own teaching and other student-related activities.

Faculty, staff and students engaged in four roundtable discussions; ten departments developed poster exhibits. The roundtables based on common themes:

Continued
1. **Closing the Feedback Loop**  
Nutrition, Dietetics, and Hospitality Administration Program  
Recreation Services  
Asian American Center

2. **Innovative Technology**  
Department of Mechanical Engineering  
Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry

3. **Multiple Assessment Measures**  
Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering  
LGBT Resource Center

4. **Use of Rubrics**  
Department of English  
Department of Management  
Department of Teaching and Learning

The **Office of Assessment Services** applauds everyone who participated in the 2009 Assessment Expo. Highlights are presented here in two slideshows. Click either frame, above or below, to get started.

⇒ After entering the slideshow, click “full” near the bottom right for the full-screen presentation. Enjoy! ⇐
Assessing Poster Presentations

At assessment expert Susan Hatfield’s March 20 workshop, she generously invited the NIU community to browse the rubrics on her [website](#). Here is one example: a rubric for measuring poster presentations. Because it is not specific to any one subject, many faculty and staff across campus should be able to use it to determine what their students know and know how to do. Enjoy!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3 - Expert</th>
<th>2 - Practitioner</th>
<th>1 - Apprentice</th>
<th>0 – Novice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poster Mechanics</strong></td>
<td>• The poster is exceptionally attractive in terms of design, layout, and neatness. • Graphics are easily viewed and are related to the topic, making the material easier to understand. • There are no grammatical mistakes on the poster.</td>
<td>• The poster is acceptably attractive. • Most graphics are easily viewed and relate to the topic. • There is one grammatical mistake on the poster.</td>
<td>• The poster is distractingly messy or very poorly designed. It is not attractive. • Graphics do not relate to the topic. • There are more than two grammatical mistakes on the poster.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Score: _____</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Technical Details</strong></td>
<td>• High level of relevant detail is presented to allow the audience to make judgments about the content. The details are not so elaborate that the presentation becomes tedious.</td>
<td>• Sufficient technical detail is included to enable the audience to understand the nature of progress.</td>
<td>• In places, the information was too detailed or was lacking.</td>
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<td>Score: _____</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Design Verification</strong></td>
<td>• Presentation includes thorough description of empirical results and explains the importance of the results.</td>
<td>• Presentation includes sufficient results to draw conclusions.</td>
<td>• Presentation does not include enough results to draw conclusions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(experimental data)</td>
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<td>Score: _____</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Presentation Level</strong></td>
<td>• The audience’s interests are piqued and well considered. • The audience’s attention has been drawn and engaged.</td>
<td>• The audience’s knowledge level and interests have been considered. • The audience’s attention has been maintained.</td>
<td>• Some opportunities for adjusting the presentation level for the audience have been missed. • The audience’s attention is weak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score: _____</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Handling of Questions</strong></td>
<td>• Presenters demonstrate full knowledge of the material and can explain and elaborate on expected questions.</td>
<td>• Presenters have sufficient knowledge of the material to answer expected questions.</td>
<td>• Presenters have difficulty answering expected questions beyond a rudimentary level.</td>
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<td>Score: _____</td>
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</table>
Class of 2007 Alumni Give NIU Favorable Reviews

Results are in for the Baccalaureate Alumni Survey for the class of 2007. Respondents felt positive about their education at NIU:

- 99 percent found that, in their major, professors were accessible outside of class
- 98 percent felt that their major professors’ expectations for the quality of student work were high
- 94 percent thought the amount of time it took to complete their degree was reasonable
- 95 percent expressed a positive attitude toward their degree major

Alumni were also pleased with how NIU prepared them for life after graduation:

- 97 percent described their overall university experiences and courses as helpful in developing their ability to think critically: to withhold judgment, raise questions, and examine contrary views
- 90 percent indicated that their overall university experiences and courses were helpful in improving the quality of their life aside from financial benefits
- 91 percent said that their degree prepared them for their present job

Overall, survey respondents had good things to say about the university:

- 95 percent stated they would recommend NIU to their friends and family and...
- 96 percent indicated a positive attitude toward NIU.

Those who earned graduate degrees in 2007 also had good things to say about their alma mater.

One year after the group’s graduation:

- 94 percent reported that faculty at NIU were thorough in their treatment of course material
- 95 percent felt as though faculty were academically supportive and helpful to them
- 95 percent reported that they completed their degree in a reasonable amount of time

- 96 percent indicated that their degree program was a worthwhile investment of their time

Alumni were also pleased with how NIU prepared them for life after graduation:

- 92 percent of respondents indicated that they were currently employed, of which:
- 94 percent reported being satisfied with their current job
- 97 percent felt as though their graduate degree prepared them for their job

Overall, survey respondents had good things to say about the university:

- 97 percent indicated that the quality of their interactions with other students at NIU was good
- 96 percent reported a positive attitude toward NIU and...
- 93 percent said that they would recommend NIU to their friends and family.
Annual Updates Show Improvement in Assessment Practices at NIU

The Office of Assessment Services is pleased to announce that submission of annual assessment updates by all 128 academic degree programs was accomplished once again in academic year 2007-2008. An annual update is a brief report that outlines how evidence was used to improve student learning outcomes through curricular and/or other changes or to document that no changes were needed. Annual updates consist of four sections: methods, student learning outcomes, evidence, and use of results. More information about Assessment Updates can be had by contacting the Office of Assessment Services at 753-8659.

Each update is evaluated on specific criteria in each section. Analyses of these ratings indicate that, across the university, improvements were seen in three of the four sections for academic year 2007-2008. Across the university:

- 90% of the criteria were met or partially met for the methods section
- 84% of the criteria were met or partially met for the student learning outcomes section
- 82% of the criteria were met or partially met for the evidence section
- 85% of the criteria were met or partially met for the use of results section

Overall, the greatest improvement in assessment practices across the university was seen in the development of clear and measurable learning outcomes (up from 73 percent last year). The only section that saw a decline was the use of results section (down from 87 percent last year). This decrease can be attributed to the call for more specific descriptions of the ways in which the results were used to improve the program to aid in the achievement of student learning outcomes.

These results represent excellent progress on the annual updates and the reporting of assessment practices across campus, and all programs are to be commended for their time, energy, and hard work.
Assessment Myths to Beware

On September 23, the Tomorrow’s Professor(sm) eMail Newsletter featured a posting from Chapter 2 of Academic Quality Work: A Handbook for Improvement by William F. Massy, Jackson Hole Higher Education Group, Steven W. Graham, University of Missouri System, and Paula Myrick Short, Tennessee Board of Regents.

“Academic Quality Work” looks at several myths about education quality, two of which pertain directly to assessment of student learning. Toolkit is pleased to reprint the following excerpt with permission from Dr. William F. Massy:

“Myth: Quality is good absent evidence to the contrary. ‘The students aren’t complaining, and the dean hasn’t taken me to task about my course evaluations. Therefore, my teaching must be all right.’

“Such attitudes reflect a passive approach to quality and one that focuses on achieving minimum standards instead of doing a truly good job. A proactive approach would be to seek out new evidence and then act on it energetically. The absence of complaints would be seen as the threshold for minimum acceptable performance, not an indicator of good performance. A shortage of evidence would be seen as a danger sign rather than one that all is well—rather like driving at night with a poor set of headlights.

“Myth: Education quality can’t be measured. ‘Teaching is too complicated for the results to be measured effectively. Besides, the outcomes won’t be known until much later in the students’ lives—many years from now. People who try to assess learning often come up with confusing or contradictory results. Measurement invites ‘teaching to the test,’ which everyone knows is bad. I know quality when I see it, so why bother with less-than-perfect measurements?’

“Many externally mandated learning assessment programs have founded on just such objections. Quality work approaches measurement from the opposite perspective: ‘How do we, as faculty members, know whether we’re achieving our goals?’ The assertion ‘I know quality when I see it’ is shown to be inadequate through probing conversations with colleagues. Academic ingenuity can find ways to make sense of the evidence and uncover new evidence if the process proceeds collegially and the purposes of the educational task are clear.”

Rick Reis, editor of Tomorrow’s Professor at the Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning, writes, “The myths at issue are unexamined but widely held mental models about teaching and research. Such myths can kill a department’s ability to improve quality.”

Massy et. al.’s Handbook is published by Anker Publishing Company, Inc., Bolton, Massachusetts. Copyright © 2007 by Anker Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved. Note: Anker books can now be purchased through Jossey-Bass.
New Assessment Manual Debuts

The Office of Assessment Services is pleased to introduce an exciting new resource: NIU’s Assessment Manual! The Assessment Manual is brought to you by and is a compilation of assessment resources from NIU, other universities, books, committees, and higher education boards and institutions.

The manual is available online and is user friendly. Its contents are designed to provide assistance to those who are new to assessment as well as those who are very experienced.

Are you a faculty or staff member with concerns or questions about assessment? Check out the “Getting Involved” chapter for information on stages of faculty involvement and common faculty and staff concerns.

Are you creating an assessment plan and unsure where to start or what to include? Take a look at the “Implementation” chapter for assistance; peruse through the “Good Practice” chapter for applied examples of best practice campus assessments; and look at the “NIU Assessment” chapter for a link to current forms, guidelines & timelines for NIU program/unit assessment plans and annual updates.

Are you familiar with assessment and looking to increase your skills or find new ideas? Take a peek at the “History of Assessment” chapter and browse through the examples of assessment best practices within the “Good Practice” chapter.

Feel free to browse, peruse, and click your way to a better understanding of assessment. The Office of Assessment Services welcomes questions, comments, and additional assistance at assess@niu.edu or 815-753-8659.


Your Input 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 we each develop, 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 cdooug@niu.edu.

Toolkit is brought to you by the Office of Assessment Services: Donna Askins, Editor-in-Chief
Carolinda Douglass, Director of Assessment Services
Amy Swanson, Research Associate
and Secretary Karyn Higgs.