



Toolkit



Volume 9, Issue 2 Winter, 2010

Invitation to Fourth Annual Assessment Expo

The Office of Assessment Services cordially invites the NIU community to the Fourth Annual Assessment Expo on Friday, February 18, 2011, from 8:30 to 11:30, in the Holmes Student Center Sky Room. This year's Expo offers three themes: (1) Use of Rubrics, (2) Use of External Assessments, and (3) College-Wide Assessment. Tools and methods for assessment will be shared! A poster session and roundtable discussions will feature representatives from academic programs and student affairs units across campus which have been recognized by the University Assessment Panel for their outstanding assessment practices in the previous year.

Those who attended last year's Assessment Expo had positive things to say:

- 93 percent said their objectives for attending the program were met

- 90 percent agreed that their participation in the program had potential benefit for NIU students
- 93 percent felt the scope of topics covered in the program was appropriate

When invited to cite what they got from the Expo, participants responded:

- "There are others on campus who we can work with"
- "We got ideas and feedback on how to improve our program"
- "The need to target a small enough, manageable, area to assess"
- "The need to 'close the loop' and apply findings"

Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m.; poster session and roundtable discussions will start at 9:00. For more information, or to register for the event, please visit the Office of Assessment Services [website](#) or telephone 753-8659.

In this issue

Call for Participation:
University Writing Project

Did You Know?
2010 Writing Project Results Now Available

Tool of the Month:
Bresciani Teaches Outcomes-Based Assessment

School Adopts Standardized Process for Submitting Assessment Data

FAQ: What else can I use for assessment besides surveys? What tools are my colleagues using?

Assessment Video:
Greg Long, Health and Human Sciences

Joan Hawthorne to Speak on March 25

Campus Assessment Network Welcomes Brian Brim

Call for Participation: University Writing Project

The **Office of Assessment Services** (OAS) invites faculty from across the campus to participate in the **University Writing Project** (UWP). This course-embedded assessment measures students' writing ability. Here is how it works:

- 1) Faculty members select writing samples from work already required. This means the project adds no extra burden to students, and there is no need to use class time for project administration.
- 2) Faculty submit completed course assignments to the OAS for review by faculty from the Department of English. These faculty are trained scorers who use a standardized assessment rubric.
- 3) Faculty then receive valuable feedback on the writing abilities of their students. These assessment results will be tabulated by department and college in aggregate format by the OAS. These data may be used for ongoing program assessment and will contribute to the assessment of general education at NIU.

For more information, please email OAS Director **Carolinda Douglass**, or give her a call her at 753-7120.

HOW ARE WRITING SAMPLES SCORED?

The **Department of English** uses a general writing rubric to score seven facets of each paper on a Likert scale of 1 (doesn't meet expectations), 2 (meets expectations), or 3 (exceeds expectations). The following criteria describe writing that meets expectations:

Focus: The writing demonstrates adequate understanding of the writer's task and establishes effective communicative intent.

Genre: The writing demonstrates satisfactory control of the conventions of the relevant discourse community.

Audience: The writing reflects consistent awareness of desired impact on audience and effectively appeals to audience expectations.

Organization: The writing demonstrates appropriate arrangement of material and provides sufficient material to satisfy expectations of readers.

Critical Thinking: The writing reflects adequate development, representation, and/or integration of ideas, experiences, or texts.

Writer's Presence: The writing suggests an informed writer who establishes and maintains an appropriate voice, tone, and style.

Presentation: The writing shows control of sentence-level features of written language (grammar, spelling, punctuation, and usage).

THE FINE PRINT

Faculty choosing to participate in the UWP must agree to the following:

1. Faculty members will send a list of students' names for each participating course to the OAS by **February 18, 2011**. These will be kept confidential.
2. Faculty members will send the instructions for the course assignment selected to the OAS to be shared with the English faculty evaluating the writing assignments by **February 18, 2011**. The maximum number of pages for any one writing sample is ten pages; a minimum of three pages of text is required.
3. Faculty members will send the student writing samples to the OAS no later than **May 2, 2011** (these may be sent electronically or by hard copy).
4. Faculty will inform their students that course assignments will be submitted to the OAS for institutional, college, and program assessment.
5. Faculty will inform their students that the results of their individual assessments will remain confidential by the OAS and will not be shared with faculty, college administrators, or any other parties. Aggregated results will be made publicly available.

DID YOU KNOW?**2010 Writing Project Results Now Available**

The **Office of Assessment Services** has now published the 2010 **University Writing Project Report**. Its 42 pages explicate the procedures and outcomes of this university-wide assessment of students' writing skills with newly revised charts based on last year's feedback.

Five colleges with a diverse mix of faculty from various disciplines submitted 518 student writing samples for review (in 2009, four colleges submitted 493 writing samples). The papers were scored on a scale of 2-6, with scores of 2, 4, and 6 indicating that the writing 'did not meet,' 'met,' or 'exceeded' expectations respectively. Four hundred and sixteen (80 percent) of the writing samples met or exceeded expectations. Work submitted from all five participating colleges met or exceeded the mean score of 4.

The 2010 **scoring rubric** allowed for subscale definitions to determine areas of strength and weakness within the writing samples. Seven subscales were identified: focus, genre, audience, organization, critical thinking, writer's presence, and presentation (see the **rubric** in this issue of *Toolkit* for more information). As in 2009, students exceeded the average score of 4 in all subscales except presentation. Furthermore, their best performances were once again in the areas of focus and writer's presence.

The **University Writing Project**, an assessment service jointly offered by the Office of Assessment Services and the Department of English, is free to all NIU faculty, regardless of discipline. Another campus-wide resource is the **University Writing Center**, which helps students improve their writing skills in a one on one setting with trained consultants. Some departments have their own initiatives to improve student writing; check with your department head, college dean, or assessment committee.

Information is always available at the Office of Assessment Services. Email assess@niu.edu or call 753-8659.

**THE UNIVERSITY WRITING PROJECT:
HOW IS IT WORKING FOR YOU?**

Each year the *Office of Assessment Services* (OAS) completes the University Writing Project (UWP) and publishes the results in a report that is widely disseminated through the campus. In an ongoing effort to "close the loop," the OAS invites you to send your feedback on the UWP and the usefulness of the results to your department. Last year we received a great deal of constructive *feedback*, some of which led to the creation of an FAQ section, and the UWP can be further improved if OAS knows:

How do you use the results?

What programmatic changes have you considered or implemented in response to the results?

How could the information provided in the report be improved to better suit your needs? Please send your feedback to Brian Lance (blance@niu.edu) or call him at 753-8689. Let's work together to improve student writing at NIU.



TOOL OF THE MONTH

Bresciani Teaches Outcomes-Based Learning

On October 15, **Marilee J. Bresciani**, Ph.D., Professor of Postsecondary Education Leadership at San Diego State University, offered a workshop at NIU entitled “The First Steps Toward Identifying Student Learning.” The presentation focused on identifying student learning outcomes and utilizing Outcomes-Based Assessment (OBA) in improving learning for students.

Dr. Bresciani made several suggestions for success in this regard, including:

- Use common language to talk about assessment across the disciplines – she calls this system a “cross-walk”
- Outcomes-based assessment should be effective, efficient and enduring
- The assessment cycle should be iterative and systematic
- Keep in mind the importance of alignment: alignment of outcomes to goals, of evaluation methods/criteria to outcomes, of results to outcomes, and of decisions to outcomes
- Assessment measures will be more effective if faculty and staff make expectations on how the results will be used, and communicate those expectations to the appropriate audience
- Finally, she encouraged the appropriate audience to document their outcomes-based assessment plans.

The workshop garnered positive comments, such as:

“Dr. Bresciani reinforced the sound assessment practice of being strategic about what we assess, as well as when and how we assess it. To me, this means that we assess what is meaningful and measurable, according to a manageable time line.”

—*Amy Franklin, Director, Planning & Assessment*

NIU Division of Student Affairs & Enrollment Management

“What jumped out at me more than anything was her assertion that one should set up one’s assessments to measure what (and how) is important for that individual/course/department/school.”

—*Jessamine Cooke-Plagwitz, PhD, Coordinator,*

Foreign Language Instructional Technology Graduate Certificate Program

Associate Professor of German and Instructional Technology

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Dr. Bresciani very kindly granted permission for *Toolkit* to reprint some slides from her presentation, shown at right. These tools can be used by any program and incorporated at virtually any time.

Ask Yourself These Questions

- What decision did you make about your program last year?
- What evidence did you use to inform that decision?
- What was it that you were trying to influence about your program when making that decision with the stated evidence?

That is Outcomes-Based Assessment (Bresciani, 2006)

- Most people do capitalize on their innate intellectually curiosity to find out what works
- Most people just don’t articulate their intended end results (e.g., outcomes) ahead of time
- Most people don’t document the decisions made based on their results
- Most people don’t follow up later to see if their decisions made the intended improvement

Bresciani, M.J.



The Assessment Cycle (Bresciani, 2006)

- The key questions...
 - What are we trying to do and why? *or*
 - What is my program supposed to accomplish? *or*
 - What do I want students to be able to do and/or know as a result of my course/workshop/orientation/program?
 - How well are we doing it?
 - How do we know?
 - How do we use the information to improve or celebrate successes?
 - Do the improvements we make contribute to our intended end results?

Bresciani, M.J.



[View all of Dr. Bresciani’s PowerPoint slides online at the Office of Assessment Services](#)

School Adopts Standardized Process for Submitting Assessment Data

NIU has been on a steady journey over the past 25 years towards building a solid culture of assessment of student learning outcomes. One critical way to support this culture is by building assessment processes and reporting mechanisms into current faculty and staff practices. By institutionalizing assessment into these practices, assessment of student learning can become less burdensome and more meaningful to faculty and staff. One innovative example of institutionalizing assessment on the NIU campus is the practice of collecting assessment of student learning in conjunction with the submission of Faculty Service Reports (FSRs), a new initiative of the [School of Allied Health and Communicative Disorders](#) (AHCD).

Through the process of reorganization in the [College of Health and Human Sciences](#) in the mid-2000s, programs in Communicative Disorders, Physical Therapy, and Clinical Laboratory Sciences merged into a single unit. Faculty in the new school, AHCD, decided at that time to develop new policies and procedures related to assessment of

student learning outcomes and FSR reporting that would assist faculty both in the collection of data related to student learning and in the use of those data results. One of the first steps in this process was the development of the [AHCD Assessment Committee Guidebook](#). This guidebook addresses the tie between the assessment of student learning and reporting in the FSR process and provides faculty with guidance on how to address school-wide supported student learning outcomes.

Each year, faculty in AHCD report assessment results with their FSRs and submit these data to the school's personnel committee which are then passed on to AHCD's assessment committee. These data assess specific school-wide student learning outcome(s) that have been selected for assessment each year. For example, AHCD has recently made improvements in its programs to assist student to better reach the expected learning outcome of "effective oral and written communication skills" (AHCD Guidebook). According to Professor [Greg Long](#), who has served as

the chair of the AHCD's assessment and personnel committees, these improvements for writing were based on assessment data retrieved through this new initiative.

Long indicates that the benefits realized from this initiative include greater transparency, collaboration, and opportunities to improve student learning outcomes for faculty and students alike. Long states that it helps the faculty of AHCD to better "close the loop" on their assessment findings. While Long reports that there has been "little opposition" to this new initiative and that the results have been useful to his unit, he cautions others who may want to implement this procedure that there must be a clear separation between the collection of assessment data that are gathered through the FSR process and the use of the FSRs to evaluate faculty performance. Long states that the new initiative helps their unit to, "shape the path" to provide assessment data but assessment results, while required in the FSRs, do not directly impact the evaluation of faculty.

Long shares his unit's story in the video shown here.



[Faster Download](#)



[Better Quality](#)

Assessment Video:

Greg Long, College of Health and Human Sciences

Professor Greg Long holds a Ph.D. in clinical psychology from the University of Kansas. His graduate education included significant coursework regarding measurement theory and individual/group assessment strategies. Assessment of student learning has always been part of his experience as a faculty member. Throughout his career, the programs in which he has taught have been accredited by external organizations. As such, alignment and assessment of program goals to meet

accreditation standards was a necessity. His knowledge of assessment at the university level has grown based on his participation in national conferences and workshops with a specific focus on general education assessment.

Click either image, right, to view the video.

Joan Hawthorne to Speak on March 25

Joan Hawthorne, Associate Provost for Assessment and Achievement University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, will lead two workshops on Friday, March 25, 2011 in the Holmes Student Center Sky Room. They are:

- “Who Helps? Broadening Participation in the Assessment of Student Learning” from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.
- “Adapting Measures of Student Learning for Your Unique Circumstances” from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Faculty and staff may register for either or both workshops through the Faculty Development and Instructional Design Center.

University Assessment Panel

The University Assessment Panel meets on Fridays. Except where noted, meetings will be in Altgeld 203 from 10:00 to noon.

December 3 - Lowden 304

January 21

February 4

February 18 **

March 4

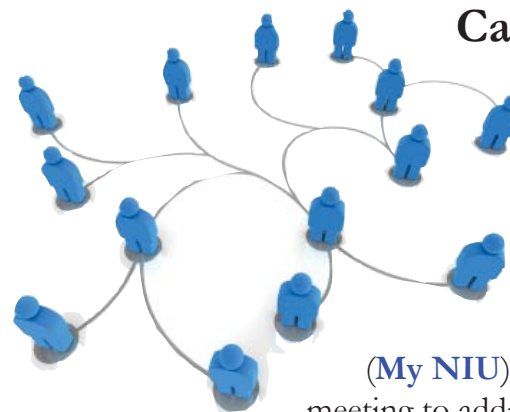
March 25 **

** February 18: HSC Sky Room – Assessment Expo

** March 25: HSC Sky Room – Speaker Joan Hawthorne

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 cdoug@niu.edu.



Campus Assessment Network Welcomes Brian Brim

The Campus Assessment Network is excited to announce that Brian Brim, Project Manager of the Student Information System ([My NIU](#)), will be at the next Network meeting to address issues concerning how the system can best be used to gather student data for assessment purposes. Brian will be speaking at the start of the meeting for about 15 minutes and then will be available for an open discussion. The meeting will be held in Adams Hall B13 on Wednesday, November 17 from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m. For more information, email Carolinda Douglass or call 753-8659.



Toolkit is brought to you by the [Office of Assessment Services](#):

[Donna Askins](#), Editor-in-Chief

[Carolinda Douglass](#), Director of Assessment Services and the Office of Assessment Services staff.