



Assessment Brief

Volume 3, Issue 1

March 2009

Special points of interest:

- Assessment training dates for March have been set. Training is in Evans 103. Information will be e-mailed to the coordinators soon!

March 17, 2009

9:00-10:30 Staff
3:00-4:30 Faculty

March 18, 2009

10:00-11:30 Staff

March 19, 2009

12:00-1:30 Faculty

- Deadline for academic units to collect their data and “close the loop” is the *end of the Spring 2009 semester*.
- Deadline for non-academic units to collect their data and “close the loop” is *June 30, 2009*.

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Thoughts on Assessment & HLC

Dr. Vernon G. Miles

Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Many people have now very agreeably said that with the election of President Obama the country is entering into a new era. I am sure you all join me in hoping so, especially those like us who share the President’s good will toward higher education. However, something that, for better or worse, has not changed with the election of the new President is the legacy of accountability that surrounds higher education nationally and regionally. This is inescapable.

Not too long ago, I had the opportunity to hear Dr. Roger Benjamin, President of the RAND Council for Aid to Education, speak on assessment and student outcomes. One of the comments he made that has become etched in my memory was that we must create a “culture of evidence” pertaining to student outcomes. This was in response to the Spellings Report and the national call for greater accountability on the part of institutions of higher education. I could not agree more. We do not yet know what the new Secretary of Education, Mr. Arne Duncan, will set as his priority, but the accountability issue is not going away. For that reason alone—not to mention the many more valuable, intrinsic reasons for valuation—assessment is something we are continuing to do and will continue to do.

As we anticipate our upcoming Higher Learning Commission visit, which will take place during the 2011-12 academic year, we should note the Criteria itself. There are five basic standards or criteria in the Higher Learning Commission’s *Handbook of Accreditation*:

Criterion One: Mission and Integrity—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. [five parts to this standard]

Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future—The organization’s allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and responds to future challenges and opportunities. [four parts to this one]

Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching—The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission. [four parts]

Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge—The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission. [four parts]

Criterion Five: Engagement and Service—The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations. [four parts]

I will not discuss each standard in detail here, as each one contains a number of sub-parts, but suffice it to say that “evaluation,” “assessment,” and “analysis” are terms that appear frequently, not less than three times in *each* of the five Criteria. That is another

My Thoughts on Assessment (continued)

reason why we need to begin to pay more particular attention to our student outcomes assessment.

However, the **real** reason why we assess student outcomes is both simple and significant. We assess student outcomes because we are intelligent, conscientious educators who want to answer a set of very fundamental questions that tell us about the levels of success we achieve, that display the gap between what we say students learn and what they actually learn in our courses and programs—Are our students learning what we think they are learning? Are our students getting out of our major what we hope that they are getting? What is the evidence that students are achieving the educational goals that we set? How successful are we really at what we say we do?

If we say, to use my own field as an example, that when they graduate students majoring in English should have a general knowledge of the literary movements in American literature from Colonialism through the Post-Modern Era, how do we judge whether our English majors as a group actually know this? How do we test that hypothesis? That is what outcomes assessment does—it prompts us to devise ways to test whether our students are achieving the outcomes we ourselves set for them. If I may be so bold as to insert a personal note, I consider assessment to be first and foremost an integrity issue. Only the most insensitive of us would not wish to know whether we are actually doing as well as we think we are at teaching students what we think they should learn. Why wouldn't we wish to know how thorough a job we are doing of teaching our students?

With that said, I encourage you to do all that the Assessment Team, Wrenette Tedder, Phillip Schroeder, Ginger Otwell, and I ask of you over the coming months, not because the Higher Learning Commission expects it, but because it truly is the very best thing for our students, your programs, and the university. These include forming good questions, stating cohesive goals and clear objectives, finishing data collection and analysis, posting results correctly and completely, and using the results (the information you gather) to improve instruction and student learning. Rest assured that the Assessment Team, the Assessment and Research Office, and Academic Affairs, as well as the entire Cabinet, stand ready to assist you in any and all efforts to fulfill our assessment and institutional research goals.

Because we had a Higher Learning Commission follow-up visit specifically on assessment after our last comprehensive evaluation, it is more important than ever that we be prepared (if not overly prepared) for the upcoming comprehensive visit in 2011-12. Your faculty and staff roles in student outcomes assessment, in case you did not already know it, are critical. You are the people who form goals, assess those goals, discover valuable information from that assessment, and use that information to improve student learning. None of this will happen without your full involvement, even your full commitment, and we need that commitment, that help, if we are to be as successful as we are capable of being.

Completing our assessment work, with extra effort beginning right now, will be critical in preparing for that our upcoming Higher Learning Commission visit.

Dr. Welch, the Cabinet, the Assessment Team members, and I all stand ready to work hand in hand with you as we anticipate a highly successful Commission visit.

From the Desk of Wrenette Tedder, Director of Assessment

Support for Planning, Improvement and Assessment in Your Unit

It was two years ago when the Higher Learning Commission sent a team to evaluate the progress on assessment of student learning at Henderson State University. Since that time the University has worked to develop a culture of assessment and to continue to move forward in preparation for the 10-year Reaffirmation visit. We must continue to work together in the implementation of student centered learning assessment plans. I will be focused during the next couple of months on offering assessment workshops to assist programs and departments with developing a strong mission statement, goals, student learning outcomes/objectives, measurement tools, analyzing the results, and making decisions based on the data collected. We have approximately three years to have 100% of the programs and departments with implemented plans along with data.

The Office of Assessment and Research supports the University's efforts in planning, assessing, and making changes to programs and/or departments. The office is available to consult on any part of the assessment process. Please contact Wrenette Tedder at 230-5270 or tedderw@hsu.edu.

If you have suggestions for items to be included in future editions of the *Assessment Brief*, contact Wrenette Tedder, director of assessment, at tedderw@hsu.edu.

From the Chair

Dr. Phillip Schroeder

Last semester I was appointed to the Henderson State University Assessment Team by Dean Maralyn Sommer as the Ellis College representative. You can well imagine my excitement and gratitude! I like many faculty members thought, "Oh goody, more work and without any purpose." I quickly discovered that my "assessment" of the situation was in error! And within 2 meetings I had been elected Chair of the Team.

The past few months have been a rapid and intense process

of learning the broad principles and intricacies of the assessment process, through studying academic writings, talking with those with extensive practical knowledge, meeting with academic chairs, evaluating other's work, and by applying what I have learned and re-evaluating my own courses. Although there is still much knowledge to gain I have discovered that a thoroughly logical, objective, rigorous, and integrated evaluation process will provide invaluable information about our student's

needs and success, as well as the information necessary to design a curriculum that will best meet our student's needs.

Please remember that assistance from any member of the HSU Assessment Team is available to all members of the faculty, staff, and administration. Among our many responsibilities perhaps the most important function is to assist you during all stages of the assessment process.

Thank you for all of your efforts!

What do you mean "Do I assess my students?"

Dr. Jane Dunn

What do you mean "*Do I assess my students? Of course, I do. I give exams over every three or four chapters and once a semester I give them a writing assignment as part of their evaluation. Isn't that assessment?*"

One would think so. My exams are very similar to those prepared by others teaching the same course to general education students. But, do I know if students understand the core ideas that I list in my syllabus? That is a bit harder. That would entail looking over each test and checking for questions pertaining to each core concept. One could look back over the last few semesters and compare the number of students each semester who answer these specific questions correctly. That would allow a comparison of each semester with previous ones on any particular concept. It would permit adjustments in the way material

is presented in an attempt to cover important concepts better.

Likewise, is there some way that one could compare student learning in one instructor's sections to that of the others who teach the same course? This



would take a bit more doing. If each instructor included a few identical core questions from each chapter, then one could compare how students were doing on those questions in comparison with the results in the

entire department. A faculty member could then determine if adjustments in curricular materials or presentation might enable students to grasp important concepts better. Isn't this what we are really wanting, a legitimate, valid way of determining if our students are getting and keeping the information we want them to take with them?



Contact Ms. Wrenette Tedder or Dr. Phillip Schroeder for more information!

Computer Science Assessment Self-Study

Mr. Jimmie Harper

As most of you are undoubtedly aware by now, an increasing emphasis has been placed on assessment of academic programs by accrediting organizations over the years. Computer science is certainly no exception to this trend. While the computer science program here at Henderson State University is not currently accredited, every feasible effort for a program of our size is made to either meet or exceed the criteria as specified by the Computing Accreditation Commission of the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET).

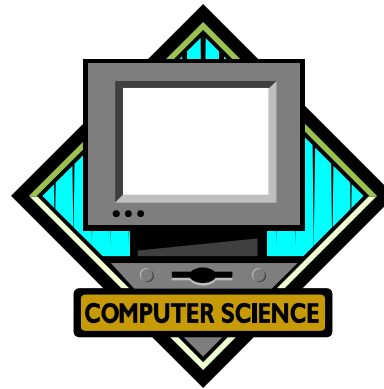
As we began the assessment process and to formalize the program's mission, objectives, and outcomes, it became clear that more than just developing a few goals and measuring outcomes would be needed. In fact, as we reviewed the program it was evident that a major restructuring of the entire degree would need to occur if we were to continue to produce competitive graduates. Although specific changes to the computer science curriculum had occurred over the years, an analysis of how those changes affected the overall program and contributed to a successful computer science graduate had not taken place.

With our task of assessment now compounded by the need to perform a self-study we set out to work. During the fall term of 2005 we began to analyze the requirements for a computer science program as specified by the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM). As part of the study we identified the ACM Body of Knowledge Areas and coordinated them with the associated topics in our courses. In numerous instances we found duplication of program content, lack of content, elective coverage that should be required, and in some cases, no coverage at all.

In addition to the ACM guidelines we also considered the degree

requirements at the other four-year universities in Arkansas. Again, we found that our program was greatly lacking in content. While the BS degree at HSU only required 34 and 11 hours of computer science and mathematics, respectively, similar degrees at the other schools required anywhere from 42 to 57 and 17 to 20 hours in these areas.

As if the above two results were not enough to promote change within the program, we also began to consult with employers of our graduates as to what skills and abilities they desire in a new recruit.



In all instances we again found that more technical knowledge than what we were currently providing was needed. In addition, it was noted that improved communication skills, both written and verbal, could provide our graduates with an advantage over others in the field.

Upon assimilating all of this information we began to put forward a greatly modified degree program containing both restructured and new courses to fulfill the perceived need. This new degree plan reflected the need for additional content hours by increasing the computer science and mathematics requirements to 49 and 19 hours, respectively. Also, six additional communication hours were incorporated into the program to enhance the graduates' abilities. As a result of the increased major hour requirement along with Henderson's numerous hours in the liberal arts

core, the computer science degree plan contains no elective hours.

The revised degree plan along with an implementation scheme requiring no additional resources was presented to and approved by the University Academic Council during the spring term of 2006. Students entering the program with the start of the 2006 fall semester would be required to follow the new plan.

While the new program was being developed, the subject of assessment was still in the forefront of our minds. After all, it was assessment that started us down this path. As we decided upon the goals and objectives of the overall program, we tied these back to the individual courses and identified methods for their measurement, not only at the course level, but, when applicable, at the program level as well. The first of our students under the new program are expected to graduate in May, 2010. While minor changes to the curriculum have already been identified, we anxiously await measurement and evaluation results from this first graduating class so that we may further adjust the program. Overall, we feel the assessment and self-study process has greatly enhanced the program. We believe that these changes along with the increased emphasis we are placing on recruitment will help our program to grow and meet the challenges that lie ahead.

**Thank you to
everyone who
contributed to
the March
Assessment Brief.**

**Your efforts made
it possible!**