

EVIDENCE

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

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Statistics Pretest Results in Psychology

By Jennifer Lyke

One outcome being assessed by the psychology program is students' understanding of statistics. Statistics is a required course for majors, and quantitative abilities are particularly easy to assess, so the psychology program began in the fall semester by administering an instrument designed to assess students' reading and understanding of statistical results. The instrument was administered in all sections of Experimental Psychology and Statistics, giving us a broad overview of students' knowledge in this area.

In that analysis, the bottom line was that native Stockton students scored better than transfers, and students who had had Experimental Psychology scored better than

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Planning and Assessment Initiatives in Student Affairs

by Joseph J. Marchetti, Vice President for Student Affairs

Outcomes assessment within the Division of Student Affairs at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey is an ongoing cyclical process that provides the division and the College with valuable measures and information on a regular basis. The division strives to be proactive in assessing programmatic and learning outcomes associated with each of the divisional offices and their services.

The Division of Student Affairs developed a comprehensive, strategic three-year planning process as part of our work for the recently completed Middle States re-accreditation process, which continues to serve us in our efforts in ongoing outcomes assessment. Essential to the divisional planning process—now as well as prior to implementing our three-year process—are the annual reports that are submitted by each functional area reporting to the Vice President for Student Affairs. These include yearly goals and objectives for each area, as well as performance indicators and user survey data. Executive summaries of these reports are shared with senior staff of the division and are incorporated into ongoing planning initiatives of the division. An Executive Summary and Overview of the division's annual report for academic year 2002-2003 can be found on the College's Web site at http://www2.stockton.edu/administration/student_affairs/annual_report/.

Our three-year planning process was introduced during the spring term and summer of 2000, when divisional meetings and staff retreats were held to discuss outcomes assessment. All managerial and professional staff within the division participated and agenda items included strategic and tactical planning, development of a divisional vision statement, and the introduction of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Self-Assessment process.

In preparation for the development of our long-range three-year plan (2001-2004), each functional area within the division was asked to conduct a self-assessment utilizing the CAS Self-Assessment instrumentation or another "program-specific" process, e.g., NCAA Self Study or outside consultants. Internal assessment teams included divisional staff from all offices as well as non-divisional staff and faculty as appropriate. This year-long planning process resulted in the development of individual office strategic plans including out-

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Statistics Pretest

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those who had not. These findings were gratifying in the sense that they provided some actual evidence that students are learning how to understand statistics in our courses. However, they also indicated that there is much more to be done since overall students' scores were surprisingly low.

This semester, we again administered the instrument in the first week of the semester to all sections of Experimental Psychology and Statistics, including the Advanced Statistics seminar. The results will be more useful once we have administered the posttest at the end of the semester, but already some trends are evident. In general, students' scores on the test of their understanding of statistics appear to be significantly related to the expected variables.

Results

The analyses indicate that there are no differences between students' scores when they are compared on the basis of age, gender, year at Stockton, major, or minor. There is the expected positive correlation between scores and G.P.A.s, however. Also, there is no correlation between students' scores and the number of credits taken, and no difference between scores of students planning to attend graduate school and those who are not. This time around there was no difference between the scores of transfer students and non-transfers, but there was a significant negative correlation with the number of transfer credits.

Finally, the comparisons of students in various classes generally confirmed our expectations that both Statistics and Experimental Psychology make a difference to students' abilities to read and understand statistical results:

- Students who had taken Statistics scored better than those who were currently enrolled.
- Students who had taken Experimental Psychology scored better than both those who had not and those who were currently enrolled.
- Students who had taken Advanced Statistics scored better than those who had not, but not better than those currently enrolled.

This much is good news.

However, from the "glass half empty" perspective, the results were again disappointing. The average score of students on this seemingly innocuous instrument was 51%, with some questions answered wrong with a frequency significantly greater than chance. In other words, there are clearly some basic things students are not learning in our psychology classes about how to read and understand statistics. We will have more information once the posttest is administered at the end of this semester, but it seems clear that weaknesses in students' understanding remain in spite of the significant gains they make in our classes. The faculty will need to make an ongoing and coordinated effort to address this problem.

Assessing Information Literacy

By Mary Ann Trail

Information Literacy refers to the ability of the student to find, analyze and use information. The Information Literate Student can properly incorporate information, no matter the source or format.

To meet the Middle States Commission on Higher Education's mandate that colleges consider their information literacy pedagogy and work to assess it, the Faculty Assembly's Ad Hoc Committee on Information Literacy spent the last year investigating what good information literacy (IL) pedagogy looks like and how to support it. The Committee surveyed Stockton faculty to gather basic information about the current state of information literacy pedagogy as well as IL literature and programs at other colleges. Recently, the Committee sent its recommendations to the Faculty Assembly and the Administration.

Students learn information literacy skills best when the instruction is integrated into the courses pertaining to their major. Research has also shown that students do not effectively integrate information literacy skills after a single lecture. Students that have repeated exposure through a variety of formats, show the most ability in applying information literacy techniques of evaluating and incorporating information into their everyday life.

The formats can include lectures by librarians, workbooks, faculty interventions, graded projects and presentations that incorporate research.

The Committee's research showed that the most effective IL programs combined efforts of faculty and librarians. Integration into the curriculum promotes multiple experiences reinforcing and enhancing the students' skills. No one group is responsible for all the interventions; however the faculty are responsible for defining the IL skills needed within their own disciplines.

Therefore the Committee strongly recommended that information literacy become one of the goals that Stockton Programs write into their program assessment plans. Furthermore, the Committee members,

- Recommend that the Assessment Committee work with programs to ensure they include information literacy goals and evaluation of those goals in their assessment plans.
- Recommend that programs reflect upon their requirements for their majors and how information literacy skills fit into a comprehensive degree program.
- Recommend that programs work with faculty to ensure that information literacy goals in courses and degree programs are clearly stated to students through written materials like course descriptions and syllabi as well as orally.

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Planning and Assessment

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comes assessment, all of which was woven into a divisional plan. The division is now in the process of developing its 2005–2008 plan, using many of the same steps.

The division uses a large number of assessment tools. These include targeted surveys and task forces. Data and recommendations obtained from these processes are shared with appropriate student-life and College offices. Recent surveys include the Residential Housing Needs Survey, the Alcohol Social Norms Survey, and the Athletics and Recreation User Survey.

Recent divisional task forces include the 2003 Alcohol Task Force and the Student Life Task Force, both of which examine targeted campus life issues, and the current Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Task Force. The 2003 Alcohol Task Force met several times and identified the major issues facing alcohol policy reform along with recommendations for change. The Student Life Task Force convened and developed recommendations regarding the new student center and renovations of the Lakeside Center. The Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Task Force has recently identified five student-development areas and is preparing a report that will establish a list of student developmental outcomes and recommended assessment strategies for each of those areas.

While we have numerous internal assessment mechanisms in place, we seek additional sources of valuable data and information that will benefit the College. For example, data obtained from the Comprehensive Institutional Research Program (CIRP), in its annual national survey administered to all entering freshmen, and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is shared as appropriate with various College offices.

The cyclical nature of outcomes assessment within the Division of Student Affairs is our method of striving to offer student programs and services that are responsive and relevant. As noted in the 2002 Middle States Evaluation Team Report, our division's sensitivity to the varied needs and interests of the student body "...is evident in the programs, services and specifically the integrated three-year planning initiatives."

Regularly reviewing the performance levels related to each program initiative through our annual report process enables the division to assess personnel and funding resources and make changes as appropriate. The development of long-range plans allows us to achieve our primary goal of providing students with high quality educational services and opportunities for well-rounded personal growth, leadership and development.



Here is a list of highlights from among many outcomes assessment initiatives in the Division of Student Affairs:

Admissions/Financial Aid

- Regular reports tracking student applications, enrollment, financial aid awards, and graduating students are made to appropriate offices of the College.
- Admissions staff meets regularly with campus offices for feedback and input related to program enhancement, particularly in relation to open houses and student interests.

Student Records and Registration

- Online capability now provides opportunities to assess effectiveness of course scheduling and supply/demand ratio for courses and sections.
- Survey data of students requesting withdrawal from college is reviewed to determine institutional factors that might contribute to student attrition.

Athletics and Recreation

- Regular reporting data regarding users is reviewed each semester to track trends in facilities and interests of students.
- Intramural Recreation Council conducts data analysis related to student usage and interest.

Dean of Students:

Campus Hearing Board

- Yearly summaries and detailed reports track number and type of violations, as well as sanctions imposed. The Executive Cabinet of the Campus Hearing Board reviews these data each semester. Appropriate programming and security-related initiatives are undertaken in response to needs.
- Dean of Students' Office staff meetings review aggregate data, particularly related to residential areas, and senior executive staff makes recommendations related to trends and violations.

Educational Opportunity Fund Program

- Quality and success evidenced by retention, graduation, and summer program completion rates.
- Credit completion ratios, grade point averages, and the number of students making satisfactory progress evidence academic achievement.

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Planning and Assessment

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Career Services

- Student usage of services and resources is monitored regularly and reviewed by staff.
- Surveys are administered to graduating seniors and alumni to determine program effectiveness and recommendations for improvement.

College Centers

- Student organizations, orientation leaders, and student employees provide input to facility and program enhancement. Student Senate is utilized to present emerging issues to staff for consideration.
- Task forces are convened as necessary to consider changes in facilities and programs, e.g., Pub, Evening Services, etc.

Counseling and Health Services (Wellness Programs)

- Regular usage reports are kept, and data is analyzed to assist with trend identification and resource allocation. Regular health services data reviewed regarding presenting problems and emerging issues. Number of student referred and treated kept monthly.
- Outside consultants (American College Health Association) utilized to provide comprehensive program review.

Housing and Residential Life

- Ongoing resident and student staff evaluations are conducted, and analysis is conducted by professional staff and Dean of Students' Office.
- Ongoing participation in national benchmarking surveys to provide data related to residential facilities and programs.

Student Development

- ULTRA Program data and number of co-curricular transcripts monitored by staff and improvements made as necessary.
- Evening Student Services Task Force reviewed scope of programs and services offered during evening hours and made recommendations for improvement.

 Thank you to Ms. Kim McCabe, Director of Communications and Technology Resources, Division of Student Affairs and Ms. Kathy Dutton, Professional Services Specialist, Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, for their assistance with preparation of this article.

Towards a General Studies Curriculum Assessment Model

By Peter F. Straub

Associate Professor of Biology
 Chair, Faculty Assembly Standing Committee on General Studies.

The Richard Stockton College General Studies curriculum encompasses a unique and rich academic experience. The curriculum has developed over time through careful consideration of the Faculty and the General Studies Program to reflect Stockton's commitment to the goal of fostering the development of students who are broadly trained in the Liberal Arts tradition. This tradition has at its core, critical thinking, reading, writing, speaking and engagement in society, the arts and the sciences. The basis for Stockton's approach to the Liberal Arts tradition can be found in the thirteen objectives for General Studies¹, developed by the Stockton faculty and based on reports by the Association of American Colleges.² These thirteen objectives, briefly, are Primary goals: (1) lifelong learning, (2) citizenship; General competencies: (3) reasoning, (4) numerical competence, (5) writing and speaking, (6) reflective reading, (7) conceptual thinking; and General content experiences: (8) artistic appreciation, (9) scientific understanding, (10) historical knowledge, (11) cultural appreciation, (12) study of society, and (13) values and ethics. While no course can hope to meet the thirteen objectives, each course, even in the major, is expected to contribute to the whole and courses that contribute to similar groups of objectives form natural concentrations.

The General Studies curriculum at Stockton is designed with these objectives in mind. For a Bachelor of Arts degree (BA), 64 credits are in the major and 64 credits in General Studies. For a Bachelor of Sciences (BS), 80 credits are in the major and 48 credits in General Studies. To ensure breadth of experience, the General Studies curriculum is distributed among five concentrations plus additional coursework in an area unrelated to the major or "At Some Distance" (ASD). The ASD coursework includes 16 credits for a BS and 32 credits for a BA degree. The five distributive concentrations: include:

General Arts & Humanities (GAH)	8 credits	
General Natural Sciences & Math	8 credits	(GNM)
General Social & Behavioral Sciences	8 credits	(GSS)
General Interdisciplinary Skills & Topics	4 credits	(GEN)
General Integration & Synthesis	4 credits	(GIS)

In addition to the coursework above, graduates are expected to complete requirements in writing (W), quantitative reasoning (Q) arts (A), historical consciousness (H), international/cultural (I) and values (V) studies which are offered "across the curriculum" and can be satisfied by taking

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Assessing IL

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An example might be the Literature faculty writing a goal that requires their graduates be able to cite material properly in a term paper. In their assessment plan students (in their capstone course) might be required to write a term paper in which their research is identified and cited appropriately. Tracing where the student actually learned the skills might be difficult. They might have been introduced to MLA format during their freshman seminar where he/she completed the Library's Research Methods workbook. Later courses would address higher IL skills; developing the student's skill in conducting research in the literature field, evaluating and understanding the content of what they are finding, and finally synthesizing the material.

In the end, the student's IL ability is the result of collaboration efforts between faculty and librarian, and between the program faculty.

Plans for Assessing Information Literacy in Psychology

By Jennifer Lyke

The Problem

One of the goals of the psychology program has been to continually add student learning outcomes to the ones we currently assess. We have started with assessing understanding of statistics and APA style in selected psychology classes during the fall semester, and one of the accomplishments this semester was deciding to target information literacy in psychology classes as another vital outcome of student learning for psychology majors.

Information literacy is clearly essential for psychology majors. They need, at the very least, to be able to use the library effectively to locate primary and secondary sources related to psychology practice and research. However, professors often report that, even in their junior and senior years, students sometimes appear bewildered when asked to find journal articles or books related to specific topics in psychology. Alternatively, they may be able to locate a source, but be unable to effectively interpret the material or integrate it into their own work. Also, students often report that they do all their research on the internet and show little understanding of the problems related to relying on these sources.

The Process

In order to determine whether the problem is actually widespread within psychology or simply a problem for a few individual students, it is important to develop some way to assess students' abilities in this area. Of course, the first place to turn for help was the library. With Mary Ann Trail's assistance, we found some templates for relevant outcomes related to information literacy. The first was a very detailed list from the Association of College and Research Libraries' "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education". This is an exhaustive list of standards, performance indicators, and outcomes that are applicable across disciplines. The utility of this list is in the specificity of the approximately 100 outcomes listed. We will eventually sort through each of these and choose the ones most relevant to psychology majors as we build on our assessment of information literacy.

Another useful source came from the APA's report on "Undergraduate Psychology Major Learning Goals and

Outcomes". Here, the goal related to information and technological literacy seemed to be a good place to start developing an assessment tool that is valid for assessing what we actually expect students to do in classes. Specifically stated, this goal is that students will be able to "demonstrate information competence and the ability to use computers and other technology for many purposes" including to search databases, locate relevant sources, evaluate their suitability, and summarize the literature.

These are skills we already regularly expect students to develop and demonstrate in some psychology classes. Therefore, instead of creating some new tool to administer in order to demonstrate that students have learned these skills, why not focus on developing a reliable and valid way to assess the output we already receive from them in the form of research papers?

The Plan

The current plan, still in its formative stages, is to begin by evaluating students' work in Experimental Psychology, a required course for psychology majors. In all sections of this class, students are required to design, conduct, and report on a research project during the course of the semester. They work individually or in groups, and much of the project depends on formulating a hypothesis that is informed by existing literature in the field. In addition, since Experimental Psychology is a W2 course, students write and re-write various sections of their papers multiple times before turning them in as a final project. Thus, if students are improving during the course of the semester in the abilities identified by the APA, then we should see it reflected in the difference between their initial attempts at writing an introduction and their introductions contained in their final projects.

The difficulty, of course, will be in establishing a reliable way to evaluate these characteristics of their projects. We will need multiple raters for each paper who will each have a set of criteria for judging the particular aspects we want to evaluate. We will need time and cooperation to read and evaluate approximately 100 papers produced by the three sections of Experimental psychology each semester. But most of all, we will need the ongoing enthusiasm that comes from understanding that, whatever the results, we will have someplace to start in our efforts to improve the information literacy of our students.

General Studies

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courses from either General Studies or from disciplinary majors. To support the transition of freshmen students into the life of the College, freshmen seminar General Studies courses are required. The freshmen seminars are designed to engage and support beginning students within the context of their first course in the curriculum. In sum, the curriculum, as described above, attempts to broaden the experiences of individual students by allowing them to tailor their coursework to their individual needs while at the same time forcing breadth of experience through the distribution requirements.

When considering assessment of the General Studies curriculum, the overall complexity of the program makes this undertaking a challenge. The number of participants, both student and faculty, is large. Courses within even the distributive concentration are heterogeneous based on subject organization and instructor. Individual courses are of a somewhat ephemeral nature and offerings may vary from semester to semester and year to year. In addition, Stockton accepts a large number of transfer students each year that must be assimilated into the General Studies program. These transfer students may have completed many of their requirements by transfer of credit from other institutions.

Keeping these difficulties in mind, and remembering that each long journey begins with the first step, the idea surfaced that a good start for beginning the assessment of General Studies would be to look at the General Integration & Synthesis (GIS) concentration first. GIS is a logical place to begin assessment in General Studies as every student, including all transfer students, must take one GIS course. The GIS course is also considered to be a capstone experience to the General Studies curriculum as it is typically taken only by seniors and advanced junior level students. As such, students in the GIS courses should be at the end of their General Studies careers. Any attempt to assess GIS students should however take into account the student's class level, the number of GIS courses attempted, and the student's transfer status.

As with courses in all the distributive concentrations, there is a built in heterogeneity in the GIS courses due to topic and instructor but all must explore problems and questions from the perspective of more than a single discipline and "seek to help the student transcend specialization and gain perspective on self, areas of knowledge, and the human condition."³ This heterogeneity of courses makes it difficult to cross compare courses in the GIS category directly but the role of the GIS curriculum in supporting the primary goals, general competencies and general content experiences that define the General Studies curriculum as a whole can probably be tackled.

Toward this end, a retrospective analysis was undertaken to determine what general objectives were most often chosen by GIS instructors, during the course approval process, as germane to their courses. Objectives 3, 5 and 7 were typically chosen by the majority of GIS instructors as being areas covered by their courses. Objective 3 is "the ability to reason logically and abstractly and to comprehend and criticize arguments." Objective 5 is "the ability to write and

speak effectively and persuasively." Objective 7 is the "development of a conceptual framework with which to assimilate new experiences- and the ability to adapt it as necessary." Contributions to each of these objectives are undoubtedly being made in the lower level General Studies courses but by careful analysis, it should be possible to develop assessment instruments that can be used to test whether the general competencies inherent in each of the three objectives is being met by the end of the students career, or by the end of their GIS experience. This of course necessitates that a pretest be given for comparison to incoming students using the same instruments. This can be accomplished by a random sampling of freshmen enrolled in freshmen seminars.

At present, the working group on assessment for General Studies has identified the three competencies that may serve as test cases for assessment. Development or discovery of instruments is now under discussion. In general, the instruments should be content neutral or allow the instructor to insert relevant content for the course. If instruments can be developed, a pre-test may be possible this fall by collecting responses of incoming freshmen seminar participants. Upper level GIS students may be tested at the end of the fall or spring semester. Once the instruments are designed, a scoring rubric will be developed and a panel of assessors will be convened to apply the scoring rubric in a manner that will minimize bias. Towards this end, rigorous anonymity will be maintained with all students and faculty participation data to ensure that data is used to further the delivery of the curriculum and not be used to assess individuals. Information collected from the initial studies will be tested for significance and utility and used to refine the exercise towards development of useful assessment tools for each of the thirteen general education objectives. Availability of adaptable assessment instruments for the objectives will allow assessment of distributive concentrations, *i.e.* categories, "across the curriculum" concentrations, *i.e.* subscripts, and may also be useful in disciplinary areas that share common learning objectives. The committee invites anyone who may know of useful tools to analyze the competencies based on the three objectives to get involved or pass on information. The committee also would like the faculty of GIS and freshmen seminars to know that we would appreciate your assistance and voluntary participation as we go forward in planning for the development and use of our assessment program.

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1. Richard Stockton College Bulletin, 2002-2004, pg. 102-103.
 2. Association of American Colleges. *Integrity in the College Curriculum*. Washington: AAC, 1990. Association of American Colleges. *A New Vitality in General Education*. Washington: AAC, 1988.
 3. Richard Stockton College Bulletin, 2002-2004, pg. 127