

Evidence: Program Assessment for Continuous Improvement

Newsletter

December 2014

Assessing Teaching Quality

At the last meeting of the calendar year, the assessment committee discussed the assessment of teaching and the role it plays in the evaluation of teaching for personnel decisions. At issue, was the operational definition of good teaching and the concern that a *de facto* definition is emerging that equates good teaching with good IDEA student ratings, and not much else.

Participants in this conversation were a mix of senior, mid, and early career faculty, and represented the library, and all schools except General Studies. Some faculty had served on the FRC and all except the early-career faculty had served on their program PRCs. Many were mentors, and most had been mentored. Faculty brought a variety of perspectives and experiences to the discussions.

Faculty prepare a teaching portfolio (file) that contains multiple pieces of evidence for reviewers to use in the judgment of teaching excellence. The evidence of teaching quality includes required elements such as IDEA student ratings, peer evaluations, and a self-evaluation of teaching with an articulated teaching philosophy, and course syllabi. Additionally, portfolios may include evidence of student learning, testimonials from peers and students, student work products, and

evidence of scholarly teaching. Do all these pieces of evidence matter? To what extent do they contribute to the conclusions that are reached about teaching quality?

There are two rounds of faculty reviewers - PRC and FRC, and three rounds of administrative review - Deans, Provost, and President. So faculty as well as

administrators act as reviewers, and all have a stake in the discussion about how we judge good teaching.

We all agreed that IDEA ratings are important but should not be the sole measure of good teaching. There was also full agreement that peer observation reports are valuable and that they add an important dimension to the overall picture of teaching quality. They should at least have similar status as IDEA ratings. There was, however, lack of clarity about the ways in which the peer evaluations should be factored into the array of evidence, especially when the peer report is strong and the IDEA ratings are modest. Committee

members raised some concerns.

1. Although most peer

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"The current model of classroom observations and the IDEA classroom assessment instruments are all summative evaluations, and primarily utilized as tools for tenure and promotion. At this point, we don't have a mechanism for observing teachers in the classroom purely to help them improve as teachers. Instead, our strategy to evaluate and (ostensibly) improve teaching is all test, all the time. That doesn't work for students, and it doesn't work for teachers, either."

Jed Morfit, Associate Professor of Art



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reviews are summative, others are formative. As peer reviewers, faculty are reluctant to include suggestions for improving teaching practice in their reports because they are unsure about the ways in which evaluators will receive these comments. If some reviewers write only positive summative comments and manage the formative feedback to the faculty in a separate document or during the post observation meeting, then reviewers may not have the best context for using both types of peer review reports in one cycle.

2. If most reviews are general and superlative, there is a risk that they will be left out of the consideration of evaluating teaching because they do not give any useful information on which to base the judgment. In this scenario, the IDEAs then become the primary basis for judging teaching.
3. The experience, credibility, and training of the reviewer matters.
4. The IDEAs are most instructive to reviewers when faculty set the appropriate context for their interpretation.
5. Narrative comments on the IDEAs are primarily written by outliers and, unless the same comments recur across classes, they are not indicative of the experience of the majority of students. Too much of a focus on narrative comments constitute an outlier bias in the review of teaching materials.
6. Mentors matter enormously.
7. Although the committee agreed that teaching philosophy is important, they were not sure how a reviewer would use that narrative in the judgment of quality of teaching.

"When faculty are able in their narratives to draw connections among their teaching philosophy, their IDEA results, their observation reports, and their teaching portfolio, they have enormous power to influence the reviewers' assessment of the quality of their teaching."

Bill Reynolds, Director of the Institute for Faculty Development

Committee members made some good suggestions for improving the evaluation of teaching quality.

- I. Evidence of student learning is very persuasive to reviewers
- II. Faculty should put their IDEA ratings in context; they should address narrative comments in their self-evaluation, and present their IDEA ratings in a developmental sequence.
- III. One faculty member who is a peer reviewer writes a cover letter with each peer review. The cover letter is meant for the evaluators and explicitly classifies the review (formative or summative) and reminds the reader that no teacher is perfect and outside the realm of instructive feedback. He also notes in his cover letter the usefulness of having formative reviews because they provide some basis for determining responsiveness to feedback, and for looking at the improvement of teaching over time.
- IV. Strongly supportive peer reviews should detail the pedagogy and materials that are used as the basis for the positive comments and should connect these to student learning.

We ran out of time before we got to the discussion of syllabi, student work products, and testimonials and the ways in which they should, and do factor into our evaluation of teaching quality. We did, speak extensively about faculty plans and mentoring. There is full agreement that faculty plan requirements for detail and comprehensiveness vary enormously across programs. There is clearly a need for more explicit guidelines about the content and format of faculty plans. The mentoring process is currently under review and the modifications that were put in place at the start of this academic year will address many of the problems that were raised in the discussion.

Civic Engagement – What Seniors Say

This fall Academic Affairs partnered with the Hughes Center for Public Policy to sponsor a longitudinal study of the engagement attitudes and practices of Stockton students and to investigate the relationship between civic experiences and attitudes. More than 400 students completed the *Civic Engagement Survey* and the approximately 300 freshmen that were part of that respondent group will be asked to update their engagement attitudes and practices in their sophomore and junior years.

These findings are from the 100+ seniors who completed the survey; they were included to give us a picture of the engagement profile of our graduating senior. The majority (78%) were women and just over half (54%) transferred to Stockton.

All students validated the importance of civic engagement. The reasons varied from the global *"We have to be aware of our society and understand some of the challenges and wrongs of our world and make a difference. We have to make our voices heard in order to promote change,"* and *"Civic engagement is the only true way to peacefully change the world about us"* to the more personal *"it broadens the mind and critical thinking."*

Students rated their knowledge of, and experiences with 32 different civic-related activities at Stockton. They were more familiar and engaged with service learning (53%), and Martin Luther King 'day of service' (42%), than they were with Stockton Neighborhood Watch (15%), Campus Kitchen (12%) or the Political Engagement Project (5%). Students who had participated in service learning were more likely to have been involved in other civic engagement activities ($r = .48$, $p = .000$, $N = 105$).

Women outnumbered men in the sample but there were no gender differences in total civic activity, community-related, or diversity-related civic actions and attitudes. Students who started at Stockton were some-

what more active in civic work than are students who started college elsewhere $t(44) \times 7.51$, $p \times .61$.

"NSSE provides institutions the opportunity to use their assessment data for the improvement of teaching and learning."

—Provost Kesselman,
Provost and Executive
Vice President

In the 2014 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) our seniors were on par with seniors from comparison institutions on all the civic-related questions, and significantly higher than our peers in the frequency with which students report that they engaged in "organizing others to work on state, national, or global issues", and to "work on local or campus issues".

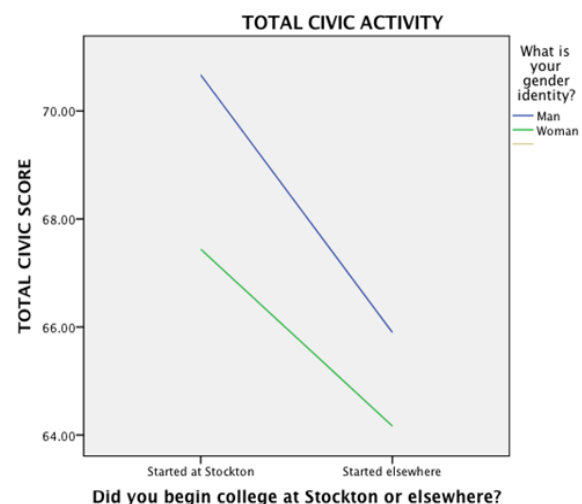
The NSSE annual report *"Bringing the Institution Into Focus"* quotes Stockton's

Provost Harvey Kesselman as saying -

"NSSE provides institutions the opportunity to use their assessment data for the improvement of teaching and learning. It is one of the vertices of data triangulation at Stockton."

—Harvey Kesselman, Provost and Executive Vice President, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey

Retrieved from NSSE 2014 Results http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE_2014_Results/pdf/NSSE_2014_Annual_Results.pdf



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In 2011, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching named Stockton as a Community Engaged Institution based on the curricular, co-curricular, and strategic evidence that the college presented in support of the application for this prestigious classification. The evidence from these two surveys appears to support the effectiveness of the organizational, instructional, and community work that Stockton invests in supporting the civic development of our students. We will know much more about important relationships between activities and attitudes as the longitudinal study unfolds.

Among the Best—COACHE

In response to a COACHE faculty satisfaction survey item that required faculty to “*check the two (and only two) BEST aspects about working at your institution*”, faculty selected a wide variety from among 28 institutional characteristics. The most frequently cited BEST aspects was “*academic freedom*” (31% of respondents), followed by “*quality of colleagues*” (29%), and “*sense of fit*” (25%). “*Support of colleagues*” and “*support for teaching*” tied as best aspects at 19% and “*geographic location*” followed at 13%.

“*Childcare policies/availability/quality*,” “*protection from service assignments*,” “*cost of living*,” and “*spousal/partner hiring*” received no “best” votes. Each of the remaining characteristics was selected by fewer than 10% of the faculty.



Hat's Off Corner

Hats off to Dr. Tait Chirenje and his environmental studies students who are walking the talk of evidence-based inquiry. Each semester I work with Dr. Chirenje's students and help them design surveys to get the best information to answer questions and evaluate hypotheses. His students come prepared with ideas and possible approaches and are always polite and willing to learn. This scientific approach supports students in the practice of critical thinking as they evaluate their data in the light of their predictions and questions.



What Comes First, The Rubric Or The Assignment?

If this is a rubric development question, the answer is that either can come first, the rubric or the assignment, or they could develop simultaneously. If this is a question about when to give the students a rubric, before or after the assignment, the answer is simultaneously!

An assignment directs learners to do certain processes (research, write, prepare, compute, reflect, draw, compose, experiment, etc.) and to create products (papers, presentations, portfolios, concept maps, photographs, etc.). A rubric tells learners how these processes and products will be judged and describes the norms for the various grading categories. The rubric operationalizes the criteria and the levels of performance, and helps students with self-assessment as they complete their assignments.

Sometimes the rubric prompts the assignment. The sixteen Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics that were developed and shared by Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) have certainly been prompts for assignments <https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics>.

These rubrics measure important complex outcomes (critical thinking, problem solving, information literacy, for example) and because of the way in which the rubrics were developed, they have robust construct validity. These rubrics were drafted and modified over an extended period of time and tested by faculty on over 100 college campuses

One scenario is that the faculty member reviews a rubric and concludes that the rubric outlines the sorts and

levels of performance that would be indicative of the outcomes for a unit or topic in her course. She then designs assignments that would allow students to show these competencies

Sometimes the assignments drive the development of a rubric. More often, faculty are measuring outcomes that are multi-faceted and complicated and not easily assessed by tests or quizzes. These are the ones that show important learning in a discipline, and faculty members know exactly what they want students to do to demonstrate what they know. Most faculty members employ “tacit rubrics” in their judgment of these learning outcomes, and they use narrative feedback and global grading to communicate to students about their progress toward and mastery of the expected learning.

Writing out these judgment criteria formalizes the rubric for both the measurement by the faculty member and the self-evaluation by the students.

Faculty members who teach online tend to use rubrics more liberally because they provide ready guidelines for students to judge their contributions to discussions and group work in the absence of face-to-face formative feedback. There are ample resources online to answer the “how to” questions about rubric development and norming. This link takes you to summary steps in the rubric development process, but it is only one of hundreds of rubric information sites, most of which have similar and perhaps even more comprehensive information about rubrics. <http://assessment.uconn.edu/docs/How to Create Rubrics.pdf>

Both the Director of Institute for Faculty Development and the Director of Academic Assessment work with faculty members to structure and refine rubrics for specific learning outcomes. You can either start with the rubric or with the assignment. In either case it is important for students to have the rubric while they plan and work on their assignments. Having a rubric encourages them to engage in self-assessment and demystifies the process of summative assessment.



“Rubrics provide guidance in assessing learning outcomes that are more difficult to quantify, such as professional behavior displayed during an internship placement. Providing a rubric to students at the onset of the assignment also provides them with a clearer outline of the instructor’s expectations.”

Amy Hadley, Associate Professor of Communication Disorders