RICHARD STOCKTON COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
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Supporting Program Assessment in the Divisions

Marc Lowenstein

I have multiple reasons for wanting to encourage assessment in Professional Studies programs. One reason is that I have to – but there are plenty of things I "have to" do that I don't do with much enthusiasm (or much punctuality). Assessment on the other hand is compelling and fascinating in its own right. Transferring your enthusiasm for something to someone else isn't always easy, of course.

I've been burned on this before. More than ten years ago I was the Stockton administrator charged with implementing the "College Outcomes Evaluation Program," or COEP, that had been mandated for us by the New Jersey Department of Higher Education. COEP was a classic example of a good idea undermined by the fact of where it came from. Some really good thinking and hard work went into it, but it never lost the stigma of having been imposed from above. Immediately after the state dropped the mandate, Stockton dropped the program. Those of us who remained interested in assessment had learned some lessons.

For both pragmatic and philosophical reasons, I know that assessment needs to be owned and run by faculty. But for most people assessment has a lower urgency level than

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Assessing Diversity Attitudes

Sonia V. Gonsalves

Stockton is in the second year of a grant-funded comprehensive intervention to better equip students to succeed in a diverse national and international environment. The three-year initiative engages first semester freshmen in a discussion of diversity issues and their professors in an on-going discussion of inclusive pedagogy. The seminars share common readings and experiences. We assess both cognitive and affective outcomes. The *Attitudes and Opinions Survey* is one of the assessment instruments. Several other New Jersey institutions that are also recipients of Bildner grants use this instrument, and we are hoping to pool our data for comparison at the end of three years.

Two hundred and seventy-two freshmen were asked to indicate what they considered to be appropriate "diversity issues." Eighty-one percent of the sample was Caucasian and 4% declined to classify themselves into a racial category; 87% of the students were in the 18-19-year-old age group; 55% were female. Racism (92%), stereotyping (86%), and homophobia (84%) were their top picks as legitimate diversity issues. Lowest on their list of 11

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Is Your Program Considering Portfolios?

Sonia V. Gonsalves

Portfolios can be created as an assessment tool for student, program, or institutional outcomes. A portfolio is a collection of multiple samples of work usually compiled over time and rated using a rubric. There are numerous advantages to using portfolio assessment. One is that the portfolio can show a development view of accomplishments if several samples are collected over time. Additionally, multiple outcomes can be assessed for example writing, quantitative abilities, critical thinking, research skills, and integration of different perspectives. Portfolios can be used to evaluate both products and process, and they allow the integration of learning and assessment. They undoubtedly increase students' participation in their own assessment and the results are likely to be more meaningful to the students than would examination results, for example. Other advantages include increased student reflection and personal contact as they tend to consult with faculty when constructing portfolio contents.

The portfolio assessment route is however, costly in terms of effort and time and is dependent on the development of reliable and valid rubrics for scoring. Both the development of the rubric and the reading and rating of the portfolios require a large time commitment from faculty. The advantages however, outweigh the disadvantages for several programs. The report by Linda Williamson Nelson shows a rubric for assessing writing and gives some insight into the process of rating the portfolios.

Trial Run of Assessment Rubric: The Writing Program

Linda Williamson Nelson

At our Program retreat on January 12, we conducted a trial run of the assessment rubric that we agreed to implement when we met in the spring of 2003. At that time, we agreed to collect the three best essays from each College Writing, (BASK 1101), student – their choices of their best from the semester. Each set of essays would represent a portfolio, so that ideally we would assess a portfolio from each student completing College Writing during the fall 2003 semester. Although we had 79 students, we actually assessed the portfolios of 64 from all the Bask Writing sections combined. A total of 15 portfolios were not submitted by students at the end of the semester. We can say, therefore, that our trial assessment included approximately 81% of the students completing Bask Writing in the fall of 2003.

Each of the 64 portfolios was judged to be *outstanding, satisfactory*, or *unsatisfactory*, according to a rubric which identifies several characteristics of each of the categories. The learning outcomes and the full list of criteria for each outcome were circulated to Assessment Committee members and to the Dean last semester. For the benefit of the readers outside the Writing Program as a reminder, I have identified a sample of the characteristics under each level of achievement. Keep in mind that each level contains many more criteria than those listed below. A brief sample of the rubric contents follows:

Outstanding

- The writer's theses and strategies are clear in each essay. The reader knows where the essay is going and why.
- Introductions are clever, crisp and logically linked to the subject of each paper. They encourage the reader to continue to read.
- The rhetorical strategy or strategies suit the purposes of the essay and the audience.

Satisfactory

- While not exceptionally noteworthy, introductions help the readers to anticipate the focus of each essay.
- At times the careful reader may have some difficulty seeing the relevance of a paragraph or a passage.
- The writer's word choice is generally correct though sometimes mundane or flat.

Unsatisfactory

- Theses and subjects are only clear in a few places; the papers are usually unfocused. Little engages the reader.
- Words are misused more than one or two times and the writer's attempts to go beyond the mundane are often inappropriate.
- Errors in sentence structure, usage or grammar are frequent and distracting.

These characteristics in turn correspond to nine previously identified outcomes for this course. Although we had no "low satisfactory category," or "high satisfactory" categories, in a few cases, some of us assessed particular portfolios at a "low satisfactory" or "high satisfactory" level. Each essay was read twice, with no program member reading the essays written by her or his students. Out of the 64 portfolios we assessed, *two* were judged to be *unsatisfactory*, *seven* were *outstanding* and *55* were *satisfactory*. Of the 55 satisfactory ones, 5 fell between satisfactory and unsatisfactory, thereby ranking as low satisfactory. On the other hand, 11 fell between the outstanding and the satisfactory categories, ranking, therefore, as high satisfactory.

We decided that we would repeat the assessment in the one BASK 1101 class this semester and add it to the fall semester for a yearly count in this our trial run.

The Assessment of Student Learning in the Program in Philosophy and Religion

Anne Pomeroy

In the fall of 2001, the Program in Philosophy and Religion, recognizing assessment as an integral dimension of the educational process and an invaluable tool to the improvement of the program itself, developed a plan for the assessment of student learning. This assessment plan in still very much a work in progress, however, we have outlined and implemented its preliminary components:

1. A statement of what we believe students should be learning in the program.
2. A standardized format for the capstone course, the Senior Seminar.
3. An exit interview that would allow students to rank their sense of intellectual familiarity with major figures and topics in the field.
4. A plan for collecting and evaluating student written work leading to the collection of multiple writing samples in a student portfolio.
5. An online information form to help us gather information from majors, minors, and alumni.

The description of each of these components and our progress in their implementation follows:

Program Statement Regarding Student Learning

The Philosophy Program at Stockton College is dedicated to creating an environment in which, in addition to content material on philosophical history, movements, issues, figures, debates, students can learn:

- To think analytically, critically, and reflectively.
- To write in an organized, creative, and powerful manner.
- To read sympathetically, with an eye towards understanding and critically, with an eye towards the truth.
- To reflect consciously and critically upon their own prejudices, opinions, and beliefs.
- To present their own ideas in a clear and consistent manner and to be open to the ideas of others.
- To recognize the impact of the history of philosophical thinking on the past and to bring the power of this thinking to bear on the future.
- To appreciate the power, fun, and excitement of ideas and their very real impact on the world.

Senior Seminar

Each fall semester the Philosophy Program offers a senior seminar which all senior philosophy majors are required to take. Although the content of the course varies

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issues and possible write-ins were anti-Semitism (46%), ethnocentrism (38%), and ageism (36.5%). Fifty-one percent were not clear about the meaning of or the merit of discussing ethnocentrism, and 39% were similarly unsure about anti-Semitism.

Forty-two percent of the student group described above believe that colleges accept minority students who are less qualified than white students; 91% disagree with the statement that "Racism in America is no longer a problem"; and 65% would "challenge others who make derogatory racial comments" in their presence.

With all the limitations of self-report attitude surveys that are susceptible to strong social desirability influences, these data still give us a starting point for discussions with students about definition and perception of diversity issues. Freshmen were surveyed at the start of their freshman seminars and later at the end. This past fall we were successful in broadening first semester students' concepts of what constitutes diversity issues; the end of semester data show that freshmen were more inclusive in their concepts of diversity than they were at the start.

Some of the survey results are immediately useful; we were able to fill in knowledge gaps in the vocabulary and to refine their concepts of some of the diversity terms. Inferential analysis of the data showed that women were more likely than men to have friends who were different from themselves in several demographic categories; students who had friends of a different race reported that they were more likely to take action against overt discrimination and were more comfortable in interactions with culturally different individuals. We discussed the results with students and encouraged them to talk more about the findings.

We have had conflicting but increasingly encouraging data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Stockton students were not different from the national or local sample in their opinion as to the extent to which Stockton emphasizes contact among students of different social, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. In 2000 and 2001 our freshmen rating of the extent to which we emphasize *understanding people of different backgrounds* was significantly lower than the national rating. In 2002 and 2003, their ratings were comparable with the national means. In 2002, seniors' rating of the same aspect was higher than the national rating. If the Bildner diversity initiative is successful, we should see more positive change in the way our students rate both these aspects, and we should engage in more dialogue about cultural complexity in our community.

Supporting Program Assessment in the Divisions

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their day-to-day responsibilities, so someone needs to keep it front and center. It's also a dauntingly large project, on which I think some programs have trouble knowing where to get started. Finally, there's still a certain amount of confusion about the relationship (*none!*) between assessment and the evaluation of faculty. All of these factors are reasons why an administrator can help get the ball rolling.

I've told PROS faculty that I will provide the resources to support their assessment plans. So far, despite shrinking budgets, I've been able to do that when asked. I *haven't* been able to afford the next step I would like to take, of carving out a portion of the division's discretionary budget and essentially "RFP-ing" it - putting it out to bid for programs with imaginative assessment projects. When the fiscal picture improves I would still like to do that. Maybe more than anything else I suppose I've been a cheerleader, encouraging all the efforts that have been taking place. That's a lot more fun than nagging programs that haven't got moving yet.

I've encountered ideas for assessment that have been created by some of the disciplinary associations. In some cases these are voluminous and rich sources of information and strategies. For example the principal business studies accrediting body, the AACSB, has an entire website devoted to assessment which even faculty in other areas might find interesting, at http://www.aacsb.edu/arc/. AACSB, by the way, uses the attractive phrase "assurance of learning" to express what assessment is trying to get at.

Not everyone recognizes at first that assessment is research. A properly designed and implemented assessment project that runs the full cycle, from designating learning outcomes to revising the curriculum in response to assessment results, is a substantial accomplishment that brings to bear one's disciplinary skills and should be of interest to colleagues at other institutions.

I've found two themes recurring in the messages that I've had occasion to give to programs, and on reflection they seem closely related.

First, you're going to be much better at assessment - design better methods, gain more useful knowledge, and above all enjoy it more - if you do it because you find value in it than if you do it because someone requires it. (That could be Middle States, the Dean, an accrediting body....) And you should value it. The reason we do this is not accountability but to find out for ourselves whether our students are learning what we want them to. That this is worth finding out doesn't need much proving.

But finding out those answers isn't the only valuable result. I think the initial step of defining the desired learning outcomes for students is actually the most interesting part of the assessment process, even though no one would consider a program's job done at that point. Defining those outcomes is an opportunity for program colleagues to compare and perhaps synthesize their various perspectives on their discipline and on the program's mission, perhaps to engage in some vigorous debate about these issues. Even if there is no disagreement, it is an occasion to make explicit what is often tacit in our understanding of what we are about. And communicating to students the product of this exercise can make an important contribution to their understanding of what they're about as well.

You're going to be much better at assessment – design better methods, gain more useful knowledge, and above all enjoy it more – if you do it because you find value in it than if you do it because someone requires it.

For these and other reasons - and this is my second "recurring theme" - I find myself often urging programs to slow down and not run too fast by the initial step. Don't *begin* your assessment project by thinking about what measures you want to use, whether you like standardized tests, portfolios, or classroom-based methods. Force yourselves instead to postpone that discussion until you've decided what you're measuring, i.e. what the desired learning outcomes are. Your choice of methods will be so much better informed if you do this.

In particular, the existence of standardized tests in many fields offers an attractively quick answer to the question of how to measure learning. But I don't recommend that programs adopt that option without first having defined what learning they wish to measure, and then ascertaining whether the instrument in question is an effective way of measuring that specific content. One program in PROS is in fact doing this, with my agreement. Even though the test seems to meet their needs, it is still worthwhile for them to define the desired learning outcomes in detail, use rubrics to define benchmark levels of mastery, and then make sure that the exercises on the test (at least some of them) match up appropriately with these.

I'm pleased with the progress that several PROS programs are making in assessment. There are others that I haven't heard from very much yet, so I guess they'll be the next ones I'm in touch with. That's where that nagging comes in.

The Assessment of Student Learning in the Program in Philosophy and Religion

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from year to year depending on the professor, the basic structure of the course remains fundamentally consistent. Senior seminars in philosophy require students to:

- Give a formal presentation on a text of philosophical significance.
- Show evidence of facility using the electronic resources of the library, including but not limited to the Library Catalogue and the Philosopher's Index.
- Produce a 15-20 page paper that properly references relevant secondary literature.

Dr. Rodger Jackson implemented this format in his seminar on *Moral Psychology*, which was taught in the fall of 2003 and Dr. Anne Pomeroy will be using this same format for the seminar in *Process Philosophy* to be taught in the fall of 2004.

Student Exit Interview Form

Upon graduation, philosophy majors are required to complete the philosophy student exit interview form which includes questions concerning each student's self-assessment of his or her familiarity with a variety of philosophical figures, issues, historical movements, concepts, and debates. This form is used to determine if students actually do report a familiarity with the sorts of figures and issues the faculty has designated as philosophically significant. It is also used to gather information and feedback concerning the sorts of new courses students might be interested in having offered in the future. Dr. Rodger Jackson administered our first set of student exit interview forms to the members of the senior seminar this past fall 2003.

Student Portfolio of Written Work

In the future, each philosophy major will be required to submit one paper from a philosophy course each semester to be compiled in a portfolio of their work during the course of their study of philosophy at Stockton. Students may also choose to include other work (written exams, other writing) in their portfolios. All the written work will be collected and maintained by the faculty and stored in a secure location. These portfolios will serve to illustrate the progress each student has made with respect to her or his philosophical writing skills and critical thinking skills. Further, these portfolios serve as a reference for faculty writing recommendations for students and for students who would like to make samples of their writing available to prospective employers. The compilation of student portfolios has not yet been implemented. One of the hurdles facing the program is the fact that so many philosophy majors declare their intent to major late in their college careers. Therefore, collecting papers from the "beginning" of their careers as majors poses a real challenge. We are working on ways to identify and track our majors (and potential majors) earlier (see "Online Information Form" below). However, in lieu of full student portfolios, the program though it would be helpful to collect and assess the quality of the papers being produced by our seniors. The first set of senior seminar papers was collected and stored on Web CT this past fall term 2003, however, we still need to develop an appropriate rubric for the assessment of written work and to find a way to perform such assessment given the time constraints upon our the very small number of program faculty.

Online Information Form

Finally, the Program in Philosophy and Religion has set up a website housing an information form where majors, minors and alumni can provide us with information about themselves, their plans, and their reflections on the quality of their education in the program at Stockton. Each of the faculty members in the program has a link to this information form on his or her homepage.

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Assessment Resources

Print resources are available in F211a

http://www.aahe.org/initiatives/assessment.htm
AAHE assessment web resources

http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm
Comprehensive higher education assessment web site with numerous links

Members of the Assessment committee in your divisions

Data analysis for surveys and tests – Contact Sonia Gonsalves

PROS	GENS	SOBL
Mark Fulcomer	Linda Williamson Nelson	Sonia V. Gonsalves
Dean Marc Lowenstein	Ellen Mutari	Jennifer Lyke
Mohamad Neilforoshan		Christine Tartaro
Michele Sabatini		Elizabeth Shobe

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