



Program Improvement & Accountability

SUNY GENERAL EDUCATION ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE

“Putting Down Roots: Best Practices in Campus-Based Assessment of General Education”

**November 13-14, 2003
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Albany, New York**

PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

Oral Presentations¹

“A Multi-Method Approach to the Assessment of Basic Communication.” Dr. Cheryl Drout, SUNY Fredonia.

This session will focus on the assessment of basic communication with coverage of written and oral discourse. A multi-method approach will be reviewed, including a longitudinal assessment of freshman composition, a cross-sectional comparison of freshman and juniors on an essay test, and a standardized rating scale for use in speaking intensive courses. The combination of methods reflects the linking of general education assessment with related assessment efforts. The multi-dimensional approach provides a comprehensive examination of basic communication competencies while stimulating involvement and campus dialogue.

“Establishing Roots: Key Ingredients for Involving Faculty and Creating a Culture of Assessment on Campus.” Dr. Ruth Andes, Genesee Community College.

Engaging faculty in the assessment of program and course student learning outcomes is crucial to the effectiveness of any campus assessment initiative. Using specific examples, the key ingredients in creating a high level of collegiality around the assessment initiative will be discussed. At Genesee Community College the strategies that encouraged both full-time and adjunct faculty participation in the assessment process included open forums, workshops, discipline meetings, modeling, readily available assistance, and feedback from faculty **outside** the discipline. Specific approaches to involving faculty will be discussed and the essential elements to implementing a fully operationalized assessment initiative will be presented.

¹ Abstracts for oral presentations are listed in the order in which they appear on the conference program.

“Computers Too? Developing an Information Management Assessment Instrument in an Information Literacy-Rich Environment.” Carla Hendrix and Debra Kimok, SUNY Plattsburgh.

This session focuses on the process of developing an information management competency assessment. The process included the use of existing national and local information literacy and technology literacy standards, examination of models for technology literacy assessment, and development of a final multiple choice instrument. Emphasis is placed on the value of the assessment development process in assisting library faculty to develop a new one-credit course for Plattsburgh’s new General Education program that meets the SUNY information management requirement. Additionally, future plans to address questions of the validity of a paper and pencil instrument to measure information management skills will be presented.

“Facilitating Assessment Through Faculty Ownership.” Ms. Frances Dearing, Dr. Wanda Willard, and Ms. Susan Belair, Monroe Community College.

This session focuses on an overview of Monroe Community College’s organizational transformation with an emphasis on faculty ownership of academic assessment with the Program Assessment Liaison and the Discipline Assessment Liaison system. This system provides an innovative approach to implementing assessment by respecting the balance that must occur between faculty and administration. Faculty liaisons act as primary coordinators, coaches and representatives of assessment activities for learning outcomes in career programs and General Education. The audience will share methods to encourage faculty accountability and motivation with General Education assessment implementation.

“Freshmen Orientation Meets Information Management.” Kerrie Fergen Wilkes, SUNY Fredonia.

This presentation will focus on the collaborative efforts used to create a successful assessment of Information Management at SUNY Fredonia. Our campus committee on Information Management created an assessment tool outside of a particular discipline, and in a pre/post test format. The pre-test was administered during Freshmen Orientation, with much assistance from a variety of campus offices and volunteers. The creation of the assessment tool, the coordination of assessing all incoming freshmen, and preliminary results will be discussed.

“Engaging Faculty in Assessment Through Interdisciplinary Dialogue.” Dr. Hedva Lewittes, SUNY Old Westbury.

Developing a plan for Old Westbury’s interdisciplinary curriculum engendered broad participation. The Arts, Western Civilization and Other World Civilizations include departmental courses which integrate different academic fields and range from the 1000 to 4000 level. A workshop addressed assessment methods and comparability, given the diverse offerings. The effect of the measure on learning and the distinction between grading and assessment were discussed. Teams based on common perspectives not discipline or department, formed to devise measures and analyze data for each course chosen through stratified random sampling. Collaboration resulted in shared approaches to evaluating creative work and uniform scoring rubrics.

“Campus Approaches Utilized in Addressing the Assessment of the GEAR General Education Learning Goals.” Dean Susan Bello and Professor Thomas Fernandez, Nassau Community College.

This session is intended to elicit a sharing dialogue among the session participants concerning their overall approaches to campus-based assessment in response to the GEAR initiative. The presenters will initiate the dialogue with a brief overview of their campus’ course-based/classroom-embedded approach. The underlying strategies of Nassau’s process to involve all faculty in the direct measurement of student learning, develop assessment measurements relevant to classroom instructional and grading practices, and provide an infrastructure that achieves coherence in addressing common programmatic learning goals will be reviewed. The focus of the session will be on strategies, rather than results, in an effort to encourage the identification and discussion of alternate assessment approaches being used by the different campuses attending the session.

“Webwrite: A SUNY Collaborative to Assess and Improve Writing.” Tina Good, Suffolk Community College.

This session will introduce WEBWRITE and demonstrate how this website can be used by all instructors and administrators interested in writing assessment. WEBWRITE, a Venture-funded initiative, is located at <<http://dephome.sunysuffolk.edu/webwrite/>>. SUNY writing programs have provided their writing assessment plans for review on this website. In addition, the website provides a forum for threaded discussions related to writing and the assessment of writing skills. This presentation will draw some conclusions about how assessment measures used throughout SUNY colleges and universities incorporate current composition theory and pedagogies and will offer suggestions for further construction of criteria in determining standards for college-level writing.

“Using Local Best Practices to Encourage Development of a Campus-Wide Culture of Assessment and a General Education Assessment.” Joan Miyazaki, William F. Collins, III, Janice A. Grackin, and Manuel London, University at Stony Brook.

We present results of a pilot project for assessment of individual general education courses focusing on natural science skills, communication and writing. We discuss detailed methods used to assess BIO 150, an innovative introductory biology course whose specific course goals align closely with those of general education. Learning activities and grading rubrics built into the BIO 150 curriculum make it an excellent working model for assessment of freshman general education performance levels. As part of the pilot project, rubrics were developed and applied to BIO 150 activities to evaluate student performance with respect to key general education areas. By stating our expectations clearly and focusing on methods and assessment processes to develop better alignment of course and general education objectives we expect gains in student performance. Approaches used to begin building a campus wide culture of assessment as a framework for enhanced faculty dialogue and community-building will also be discussed.

“Completing the Loop – Coordination/Integration of all College Assessment through Institutional Research.” Dr. Michael Schaff and Rick Miller, SUNY Potsdam.

This presentation will outline the relationship between the directors of General Education and Institutional Effectiveness and how that relationship allows for smooth interaction between departments and individual faculty who administer direct measures of performance-based assessment of student learning outcomes. General Education Assessment and Departmental Program Assessment are integrated, where results can be used for multiple purposes including visits from NCATE and Middle States accrediting agencies. We will share methods of combining efforts such as workshops on assessment at the program (department) and classroom (General Education) levels, as well as answer questions relating to how this aids in faculty “buy-in” of assessment on our campus

“Assessing a General Education Program through a ‘Capstone’ Course.” Dr. Patricia Higgins and Dr. James Armstrong, SUNY Plattsburgh.

When and where to measure student learning can be as important a decision in student outcome assessment as deciding why, what, and how to measure student learning. At SUNY Plattsburgh the General Education Committee has been promoting the use of our upper-division “capstone” course as the most appropriate venue for student outcomes testing. Here we discuss what we have found to be the primary advantages of this approach, its limitations and disadvantages, and possible ways of overcoming its weaknesses.

“General Education Assessment: Year 1 – What Worked and What Didn’t.” Holly Pennock, Vivian Tortorici, and Dr. Peter Schaefer, Hudson Valley Community College.

This session will focus on the process used to develop specific examples of assessment mechanisms designed to foster faculty dialogue. The overall goal was to utilize assessment measures which were already in place in General Education courses. The challenge of supporting flexibility required for multi-sectioned courses will also be addressed. An example which was successful and one that was not will be presented. In addition, the mechanics of gathering and reporting the data will be included.

“Embedding Written Communication Assessment in a College Writing Course.” Bill Baskin, SUNY Purchase.

This presentation works through one way of embedding SUNY’s written communication student learning outcomes (SLOs) into an existing College Writing course. Among the most common learning activities in college writing courses are papers. Assigning three papers each in a different genre requires students to “produce coherent texts within common college-level written forms” (SLO 1). Requiring three drafts of each paper helps students “demonstrate the ability to revise and improve such texts” (SLO 2). Using appropriate rubrics, and concluding with a research paper, measures students’ ability to “research a topic, develop an argument, and organize supporting details” (SLO 3).

“Enhancing the Utilization of GEN ED Data to Assess the Major.” Sarah H. Baldwin and Edward J. Knapp, Jefferson Community College.

This session focuses on an information system intended to store student achievement data of General Education learning outcomes, to enable the College to disaggregate this information by Major. Jefferson Community College expects General Education performance to be assessed in all Majors. Therefore it is essential to enhance the GEN ED assessment system approved by GEAR in order to better analyze student achievement information by Major. This analysis will result in identifying General Education areas in which students have met or exceeded our goals, as well as those areas that need to be strengthened.

“Moving Beyond ‘Three Tests and a Final:’ The Role of Rubric Development in Integrating Multiple Measures and Authentic Assessment.” Kathleen M. Beney, SUNY Upstate Medical University.

This session focuses on our initial experiences with the development and implementation of rubrics as the standard for assessment of student portfolios, often within the context of courses that historically utilized “three tests and a final” as the evaluative tool. The process generated vigorous discussion on traditional versus newer/innovative assessment concepts and techniques, and prompted the examination of how (and with what degree of congruence) course goals/objectives are written, delivered and assessed. This created opportunity for faculty to reflect on how these newer concepts and techniques might be applied beyond this particular initiative and to their specific courses and curricular domains.

“Evolution from Assessment Aversion to Assessment Acceptance: One Community College’s Story.” Dr. Lorna E. Forster, Clinton Community College.

When faced with the task of assessing all of our general education courses, faculty were not enthusiastic. Like all campuses, we faced limited resources of time, energy and money. Further, there was widespread suspicion concerning how results were going to be used. This session explains how we managed to begin a shift in culture. Details on the efforts of both administration and faculty to foster a productive environment wherein a plan of assessment uniquely suited to our campus could be developed and implemented will be shared. Successful strategies for building a faculty infrastructure to support effective assessment will be discussed.

“Creating a Comprehensive General Education Assessment Model: A Call for Executive Support, Collaboration of Key Stakeholders, and Triangulation of Measures.” Dr. Shawn Van Etten and Dr. Mark Prus, SUNY Cortland.

The aim of this presentation will be to provide a five-year evolutionary history of Cortland's General Education Assessment; a presentation that will accentuate strengths associated with our efforts and also highlight strategies for overcoming our trials and tribulations. In general, we will address three specific aspects of our assessment program: (a) the role of executive support as a necessary but insufficient component for the development of a comprehensive and successful assessment program; (b) the need for collaboration of all key stakeholders at every phase of the development, implementation, evaluation, and regulation of a comprehensive and successful assessment program; and, (c) the need for triangulation to promote a credible and creditable assessment program which provides fruitful feedback aimed at curricular, faculty, and student advancement.

“Special Issues in the Assessment of International Students.” Fred Hildebrand, SUNY Morrisville; and, Peter Thomas, System Administration.

Differences between international and native students (e.g., training, background knowledge, learning styles, and communication skills) mandate special attention in the outcomes assessment of the visitors — otherwise the results would be neither reflective of individual attainments, nor usable in a comparison with other student groups. As our assessment activities and our population of international students increase, we analyze the experiences of other systems of higher education which have dealt with the assessment of cross-border students. The European Union and Canada are the primary foci of the review, and related entities such as the International Baccalaureate Organization, and World Education Services are also covered. Tools and procedures are analyzed and recommendations made for creating a special outcomes assessment sub-process that will measure the attainments of our international students, and make these data analyzable within the context of all other student evaluations.

Poster Presentations

“Practical Challenges in Humanities Assessment at Broome Community College.” Andrew Haggerty, Broome Community College.

The challenges we faced at Broome Community College when it came to assessing our humanities courses ranged from the practical to the philosophical. As it turned out, however, we had much more trouble solving the practical problems than we did the philosophical. Coordinating a diverse group of faculty, agreeing upon what the assessment documents should look like, and simply finding the time to run the assessment activities were all daunting tasks. We hope to engage in fruitful dialogue with faculty at other institutions on ways to solve the practical problems that inevitably arise in the assessment process.

“Assessing Mathematics at SUNY Fredonia: Communication and Collegial Relationships.” Dr. Peter G. Sinden, SUNY Fredonia.

This presentation will describe the assessment of learning outcomes for Mathematics at SUNY Fredonia. This complicated task required us to assess the competency of students in five areas – arithmetic, algebra, geometry, data analysis, and quantitative reasoning – among those who were enrolled in 26 different courses taught by 15 different faculty from five different disciplines. Our solution required planning, a pre-testing and evaluation of the assessment method, the implementation of the method, and the scoring, reporting and utilization of the results. Two factors that were essential to the success of this assessment – effective communication and the facilitation of collegial relationships – will be described as well.

“Campus Structure to Support Effective Assessment.” Deborah Sorrentino, Niagara County Community College.

This poster focuses on the structure Niagara County Community College uses to maintain and support effective assessment. A Coordinator of Assessment position was created to coordinate campus-wide assessment activities. The coordinator works closely with faculty and program coordinators to develop assessment criteria, assess learning outcomes, and utilize the assessment results as a basis for improvement. The coordinator is also assisted by a newly formed Faculty Senate Committee on Assessment of General Education, whose charge is to make recommendations for all issues involving General Education and its implementation on campus. This faculty-centered approach in conjunction with the various support mechanisms has worked successfully at Niagara County Community College.

“Thinking Collaboratively About Critical Thinking.” Mary Dickson, Broome Community College.

Supported by a SUNY System Administration Venture Fund Assessment Seed Grant, six faculty at Broome Community College who teach Communicating About Ideas and Values—a capstone course that makes critical thinking an explicit learning outcome—used release time to develop an instrument to assess critical thinking. The faculty read, wrote, and talked about critical thinking, meeting regularly in an effort to define critical thinking, to consider how it is best taught and learned, and to explore various approaches to its assessment. As a result of their endeavors, the faculty produced an assessment instrument labeled a Multi-Rater Item Assessment Protocol. The Protocol, in its several permutations, was used to assess critical thinking in the College’s first year of assessment of SUNY General Education Knowledge and Skills Areas and Competencies.

“Using an Assessment Newsletter to Encourage Faculty Involvement.” Richard Courage, Westchester Community College.

This session focuses on the creation and use of a newsletter as a vehicle to share information and ideas about assessment and involve faculty as editors and writers. The four issues (to date) of WCC’s newsletter TALK, Teaching/Assessment/Learning Konnection, will be displayed, and information provided about launching a newsletter, tapping the skills and knowledge of colleagues in its production, and more generally using a newsletter to demystify assessment and begin to build a community of assessment practitioners.

“Measuring Science Outcomes at Rockland Community College.” Dr. Susan Golz, Rockland Community College.

Two natural sciences student learning outcomes were measured for General Biology I and Inorganic Chemistry I during the Fall 2002 semester. “Understanding of the methods scientists use to explore natural phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical analysis” was measured using four questions for the biology lab sections and a lab report for the chemistry sections. “Application of scientific data, concepts and models in one of the natural sciences” was evaluated using seven questions in biology lecture sections and four chemistry problems in chemistry lecture sections.

“The SUNY Assessment Initiative: Campus-Based General Education Assessment – Results Year One.” Donald Steven, System Administration; and, Patricia Francis, SUNY Cortland.

This presentation provides aggregate data from the 51 SUNY campuses that took part in the first year of implementation for campus-based general education assessment, and will also examine plans for the next two years of implementation. Specifically, for each learning outcome area assessed during 2002-03, the proportion of students who exceeded, met, approached, or failed to meet standards will be presented. This information will also be broken down by sector and will feature a content analysis of what institutions reported as the major benefits and weaknesses of the assessment process, as well as plans for improvement to courses and programs. Finally, the presentation will feature summary information on the overall status of campus-based assessment of General Education.

“The GEAR Group: Reflections on the First Year.” GEAR Group Members.

This session focuses on the activities of the General Education Assessment Review (GEAR) Group during the first year of campus-based general education assessment, with special emphasis on the review and feedback processes. Members of the GEAR Group will be available to discuss criteria for evaluating campus plans as well as issues and challenges the group has addressed since its formation in January 2001. Overall, the session will highlight the progress in campus-based general education assessment to this point and plans for the future. Handouts will also be available, including updated review guidelines, sample evaluation forms, and campus reporting forms. Most important, GEAR Group members will be pleased to answer questions and discuss your suggestions as we enter our second year of review, and attendees will be provided a systematic way to submit feedback and recommendations for change. We look forward to your input.

“Information Management: A Value-Added Assessment Approach.” Margaret Porciello and Melanie Vainder, SUNY Farmingdale.

This session illustrates a value-added process to assess Information Management while providing intervention strategies to ensure achievement of the student learning outcomes in this area. Pre- and post-test measures which assess Library Literacy, Windows Operating System, Word Processing, and E-mail usage will be presented. The session will also describe how scoring will be conducted to allow for “discrete” analysis of areas of weakness. Also presented will be remediation strategies and opportunities to allow those students who do not meet expectations on the pre-test, to succeed upon post-testing. These will include Blackboard and Library Tutorials.

“Increasing Faculty Involvement in Assessment.” Dr. Jack Meacham, SUNY at Buffalo.

Effective assessment of student learning outcomes requires participation and support from faculty at each step of the assessment process, from establishing student learning objectives to interpreting and making use of assessment results to improve student learning. Faculty involvement in the assessment process can be increased by addressing common faculty misunderstandings of assessment purposes and procedures, responding to faculty concerns about reporting and utilization of assessment results, including faculty governance bodies in planning for and implementing assessment, showing how both students and faculty benefit from assessment, and providing faculty with opportunities to gain expertise in assessment and with the full resources essential for effective assessment.