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St. Norbert College

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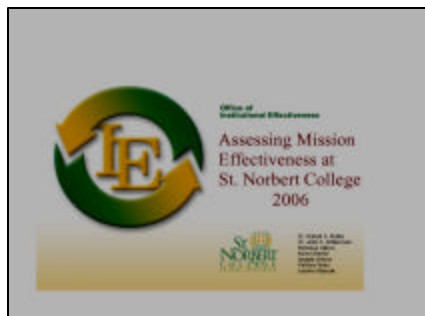
# INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Volume 6, Issue 4  
February 16, 2007

## Assessment News

### NEW REPORT AVAILABLE

Take a look at OIE's most recent report on-line. [www.snc.edu/oie/reportspres/login/reports\\_and\\_presentations.html](http://www.snc.edu/oie/reportspres/login/reports_and_presentations.html). **Assessing Mission Effectiveness at St. Norbert College** summarizes campus data related to our stated Mission outcomes and compares these data to national norms whenever possible. Some of the most interesting charts show students' assessments of the College's contribution as they progress through each of their four years and as graduates. Data are presented for the eight most recent graduating classes (1998-2006).



### REQUEST FOR BRIEF PROGRESS REPORT

In April, at the request of the Dean's Council, the OIE will ask discipline coordinators to provide a brief progress report on discipline assessment activities during the 2006-2007 academic year. Realizing that the next accreditation visit is a little more than 4 years away, the objective is for each program to organize their assessment activities over a two and a half year cycle (coinciding with their program review date), but to accomplish some part of their overall plan (e.g. collect data, analyze data, revise plan, develop measures, implement program changes, etc.) each year. This brief progress report (one or two paragraphs) will help us sustain the momentum we achieved before the Focused Visit. If the OIE can assist you, please call or email.

### LIMITED FUNDS AVAILABLE

Although the Title III Grant has officially ended, some carryover funds remain to support assessment projects. The form for requesting funds is available on the OIE homepage. Any funds requested would have to be expended by May 1, 2007.

### ACADEMIC WARNINGS AND RETENTION: ANY RELATIONSHIP?

By: Jack Williamsen  
Retention Coordinator/Data Analyst

The Academic Warning Program began in the early 1970s as the Midterm Evaluation Program. As the latter title implies, these evaluations were intended to inform students in academic jeopardy of their status in time for them to (hopefully) make some positive mid-course corrections.

We now know that, at least for some students, formal notification at midterm is too late. By that time, a series of poor grades may make withdrawal the only reasonable alternative to failure, even though the course is only about half-over.

Thus the transformation of the Midterm Evaluation Program into the Academic Warnings Program. Academic Warnings are available soon after classes begin, allowing professors to formally notify students they are already jeopardizing their academic success, even in the first weeks of a course. And opportunities to issue Academic Warnings extend beyond the midterm period.

Given the resources devoted to this program, it is of interest to know if Academic Warnings are useful. For example, do they serve the ultimate purpose for which they are intended, namely, stimulating students who receive them to take positive corrective action? (The preliminary answer to the 'usefulness' question is a cautious yes, at least for a portion of recipients.) More broadly, are academic warnings related in any way to the issue of student retention? (Again, the answer appears to be affirmative.)

#### *Academic Warnings and Course Grades*

Take a look at Table 1, which provides relevant information for both semesters of academic years 2005-2006 and 2004-2005, the most recent available. The table focuses on the freshmen year, where the heaviest attrition occurs. There are several features of note.

About 55%-60% of first semester freshmen who received a "marginal" warning ultimately passed (Continued on Page 2)

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#### Assessment Conference Possibilities

7th Annual Assessment Conference at Texas A&M University, February 22-23, 2007.

AAC&U's General Education and Assessment: Engaging Critical Questions, Fostering Critical Learning, March 1-3, 2007, Miami, Florida.

Higher Learning Commission, Leading for the Common Good, April 20-24, 2007, Hyatt Regency Chicago, IL

AIR 47th Annual Conference, Choice/Chance: Driving Change in Higher Education, June 2-6, 2007, Kansas City, Missouri.

AAC&U's 7th Annual Greater Expectations Institute, Campus Leadership for Student Engagement, Inclusion, and Achievement, June 20-24, 2007, Burlington, Vermont.

**Table 1: Type of Academic Warning and Final Grade****Note: The data below are based on First Course Warning and First Course Final Grade only.****Semester I Comparison of 2005-06 w/ 2004-05**

If Midterm was...	Then percent Freshmen with <b>final grade</b> of ____ was...				<b>N</b>	<b>% All MTE</b>
	<b>C or &gt;</b>	<b>CD or D</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>		
"M" (2005-06)	60.4%	23.6%	4.2%	11.8%	119	<b>67.6%</b>
"M" (2004-05)	56.7%	20.4%	2.8%	14.9%	141	<b>71.9%</b>

If Midterm was...	Then percent Freshmen with <b>final grade</b> of ____ was...				<b>N</b>	
	<b>C or &gt;</b>	<b>CD or D</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>		
"F" (2005-06)	31.7%	24.5%	10.5%	33.3%	57	
"F" (2004-05)	23.6%	25.4%	9.1%	40.0%	55	

**Semester 2 Comparison of 2005-06 w/ 2004-05**

If Midterm was...	Then percent Freshmen with <b>final grade</b> of ____ was...				<b>N</b>	<b>% All MTE</b>
	<b>C or &gt;</b>	<b>CD or D</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>		
"M" (2005-06)	59.8%	20.9%	6.0%	13.4%	67	<b>61.5%</b>
"M" (2004-05)	59.1%	26.7%	1.9%	12.4%	105	<b>64.0%</b>

If Midterm was...	Then percent Freshmen with <b>final grade</b> of ____ was...				<b>N</b>	
	<b>C or &gt;</b>	<b>CD or D</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>W</b>		
"F" (2005-06)	14.4%	40.5%	2.4%	42.9%	42	
"F" (2004-05)	35.6%	23.7%	6.8%	33.9%	59	

the course in question, with about another 20% - 24% obtaining final grades of "D" or "CD" (enough not to fail, but also not to meet the 2.00 GPA, required for graduation). Approximately 16%--18% of those receiving a "marginal" warning either failed the class or withdrew—a clearly undesirable result.

Undesirable consequences were even more likely for freshmen receiving a "failing" academic warning. Not even a third of these students passed the course with a grade of "C" or higher, and 40% - 50% failed the class or withdrew. Ouch!

Comparable figures for the second semester (see lower half of table) were slightly more positive for recipients, perhaps reflecting greater time management and study skills. But the different results associated with "marginal" vs. "failing" warnings remained, suggesting that faculty do indeed differentiate between academic performances that are borderline and those that are unsatisfactory.

**What about Retention?**

Academic warnings (and their consequences) should alert students, academic advisors, instructors, and anyone interested in student retention that recipients are at increased risk of leaving St. Norbert. The next table sequentially examines (1) the impact on retention of receiving/not receiving one or two academic warnings, (2) the differential effects of receiving at least one "failing" vs. "marginal" midterm, and (3) the effect on retention of receiving at least one final grade of "F" or "W." The data for 2005-2006 freshmen are reported by semester. And take note: the attrition shown in the table is for freshmen who left *voluntarily* (i.e., were in good standing at the time of departure), not those who were dismissed.

The top third of the table shows that increases in voluntary withdrawals were associated with increases in warnings received. For both first and second semester, fewer students with no warnings left than those with one or-- even more so--two warnings.

(Continued on Page 3)

Similarly, as the middle third of the table shows, a failing warning was associated with more voluntary departures than marginal warnings or no warnings at all. This may be so because—as the bottom third of our table demonstrates—final course grades of “F” or “W” have a clearly detrimental impact on retention, and these final course grades are most often a consequence of an earlier warning of failing academic performance (see Table 1, above).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This initial examination of the relationship between academic warnings and retention offers evidence that the two are related, but the chain of causation remains to be determined. One hypothetical sequence might go like this: a midterm warning increases the likelihood of obtaining a less than satisfactory grade (“satisfactory” defined as at least a “C” or higher). Unsatisfactory grades, in turn, increase the likelihood that the recipients and/or their parents question the viability of continuing at St. Norbert, for financial reasons and/or those related to personal satisfaction or level of academic achieve-

ment. The result is a group of students more likely to consider other options, such as transfer to another institution.

Of course, the matter may well be more complicated than this. But don’t let the complications obscure the fact that academic warnings should be taken seriously. Freshmen who receive two or more such warnings, or who have a warning of failing performance, are especially in need of some kind of evaluation to determine if we can help.

As Table 2 indicates, the majority (at least two-thirds) of freshmen with academic warnings will continue into their sophomore year. But it is quite plausible that at least a portion of those who decide to transfer might be in a situation that could be addressed successfully, allowing them to complete a degree at St. Norbert.

Given the investment both College and student have made in each other, that’s worth finding out. Consideration of transfer from St. Norbert should be truly voluntary and in the student’s best interest, not forced by a series of poor decisions or unfortunate circumstances whose consequences are remediable.

**Table 2: The Impact of Academic Warnings on Retention**

<b>Semester 1</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Left (Voluntary)</b>	<b>N</b>
No Midterms	95.4%	4.6%	327
One Midterm	89.7%	10.3%	97
Two Midterms	83.3%	16.7%	60
<b>Semester 2</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Left (Voluntary)</b>	<b>N</b>
No Midterms	91.3%	8.7%	344
One Midterm	81.0%	19.0%	79
Two Midterms	76.0%	24.0%	25
<b>Semester 1</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Left (Voluntary)</b>	<b>N</b>
No Midterms	95.4%	4.6%	327
"M" Midterm	88.2%	11.8%	119
"F" Midterm	82.5%	17.5%	57
<b>Semester 2</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Left (Voluntary)</b>	<b>N</b>
No Midterms	91.3%	8.7%	344
"M" Midterm	89.6%	10.4%	67
"F" Midterm	66.7%	33.3%	42
<b>Semester 1</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Left (Voluntary)</b>	<b>N</b>
No Midterms	95.4%	4.6%	327
Course Grade = F	72.7%	27.3%	11
Course Grade = W	81.8%	18.2%	33
<b>Semester 2</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Left (Voluntary)</b>	<b>N</b>
No Midterms	91.3%	8.7%	344
Course Grade = F	100%	***	5
Course Grade = W	70.4%	29.6%	27

## ASSESSING CULTURAL AWARENESS

By: Dr. Tom Conner,  
Professor of Modern Foreign Languages

Thanks to funding from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, I was able to attend the annual meeting of ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) in Nashville, Tennessee, November 16-19, 2006. ACTFL is the nation's largest association for foreign language professionals and typically attracts approximately 5000 teachers at the K-16 level. The more than 600 panels during this three-day extravaganza covered everything from trends and issues in education, such as assessment of learning outcomes and placements tests, to practical pedagogical topics, for example, using film in the foreign language classroom and implementing techniques to strengthen students' language skills in a literature class (which, according to research, typically does not hone these skills in a very structured way, even though it is taught in the target language). All participants were likely to find something of interest to them and also had the opportunity to visit the exhibit hall in the Nashville Convention Center, where 200 or so companies, big and small, displayed their latest products, not only books, but also computer software, films, music, games, etc.

The purpose of my visit was to attend a variety of sessions on the topic of assessment, both linguistic and cultural, in order to update my knowledge of this important subject and better serve the assessment needs of my discipline, Modern Foreign Languages. I had already attended several workshops on assessment sponsored by ACTFL, NECTFL (Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) and SCOLA (which is a non-profit organization that broadcasts foreign news), and had authored various articles and reviews on the subject, so I was hardly a novice at assessment. Of course, MFL has already implemented an assessment plan of its own, which challenges every member of the Discipline to better understand assessment and make necessary changes in our plan. However, foreign language assessment has been constantly changing, so it has behooved every foreign language professional to stay abreast of recent developments. Staying informed is half the battle. For example, the recent addition of cultural assessment to MFL's assessment plan has made it necessary for me to learn more about this particular area of assessment and find the ideal assessment tool. Although my assignments using SCOLA news broadcasts and the print media have worked well for us, I did not doubt that there were other, equally effective, assessment instruments. The problem has been to find them.

As one colleague from Oklahoma stated in her presentation at the conference: "assessment has not kept pace with instructional strategies" that are becoming ever more integrated, combining language and culture to create an embedded foreign language classroom. To begin with, assessment in foreign languages was limited to assessing language competency (both written and oral), and MFL eventually adopted ACTFL's proficiency guidelines, which we still implement in our Senior seminars (e.g., FR 400); however, the assessment movement soon added cultural competency, and MFL followed suit. Already two years ago I developed a plan to assess cultural competence through French news broadcasts (which SCOLA carries twice daily on channel 5) and a variety of assignments in my French Civilization (Fr 375) class; now I would like to expand cultural assessment to include other

considerations such as the complex relationship among language, literature, and culture. Cultural awareness is produced at virtually every level of our curriculum, from the time a student enrolls in 101 to the time s/he completes the Senior seminar, so it makes sense to adopt a more comprehensive assessment tool—perhaps a diagnostic test—that reflects a student's evolving understanding of a foreign language and culture. Actually, foreign language professionals are still exploring the idea of developing a comprehensive test that would assess linguistic and cultural competence together; more than a dozen sessions at the recent ACTFL meeting this year dealt with testing.

I attended one dozen or so sessions dealing with various aspects of assessment but, alas, did not find the perfect assessment tool, neither for evaluating learning outcomes nor for placing students at the appropriate level. ACTFL has developed guidelines for evaluating linguistic and cultural competence (so-called "rubric criteria," such as "language control, cohesion and mechanics"), but leaves it up to educators in the field to interpret these guidelines and develop tools (for example, diagnostic tests) and tasks (i.e., exercises and assignments) that demonstrate how well students perform at, say, the "intermediate low" level. As for placement, the latest trend is on-line testing, a field in which Brigham Young University is the undisputed national leader. At St. Norbert we implemented on-line placement tests last fall and have been reasonably satisfied with our experience. Furthermore, we intend to use the placement test twice, once for placement and once for assessment. Ideally, we would use a more sophisticated tool for assessment purposes but the one being developed by BYU in Spanish will take a whopping nine hours to complete, despite being billed as a simple "diagnostic test," and will have no precise place in the foreign language curriculum. I am afraid that such a tool would be overkill, since we can safely assume that students will not willingly submit to such an ordeal just for kicks or personal satisfaction. We hope that a more reasonable evaluation tool will be developed in the near future.

All in all, I felt that I had a productive visit to Nashville and I would be more than happy to discuss it with anyone interested, so please do not hesitate to get in touch. A bientôt!



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