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9-3-2004

Volume 4, Issue 1

St. Norbert College

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ASSESSMENT NEWS

An Evaluation of St. Norbert College's Progress on Assessment
Dr. Marguerite Bennett, Executive Assistant to the President for Institutional Research, Mount Vernon Nazarene University
Visit: June 23-25, 2004

Editors Note: Reproduced below are verbatim excerpts from Dr. Bennett's report. Dr. Bennett's comments offer an early indication of how the Higher Learning Commission visiting team is likely to view our progress on assessment during the upcoming focussed visit scheduled for March 5-6, 2004. Dr. Bennett's comments can also be read as a useful inventory of work that needs to be accomplished prior to the focussed visit.

Assessment

Noteworthy Accomplishments
St. Norbert College's most notable accomplishments over the past three years are the results of its creation of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness (OIE), funded through a five-year Title III grant, and the assessment activities it has sponsored and promoted. St. Norbert College has made tremendous strides in assessment since the HLC accreditation visit. The OIE has developed an impressive interactive database and website that hosts all of the institution's assessment evidence, organized according to institutional divisions, general education, academic majors, and special programs. Pulling together all of the institution's data and establishing and monitoring the electronic database for easy access by the campus community has significantly and positively impacted assessment progress.

The OIE has provided training and support to faculty and staff that has enabled a substantial percentage of institutional departments and programs to develop and implement program assessment plans and apply appropriate student-learning

outcomes measures. The OIE is commended for the number of assessment workshops and small-group and one-on-one meetings offered over the past three years. Its use of technology has made campus student-learning outcomes and other student data transparent for the campus community and has contributed to the increased visibility and impact of assessment on SNC campus culture. The OIE has produced a series of outstanding newsletters; their dissemination to the campus community has been an effective means of communicating assessment results and keeping assessment in the forefront for faculty and staff.

The online *Outcomes Assessment* page currently includes assessment plans for 37 of the 56 academic, mission and heritage, and student life departments. Departmental assessment reports are easily accessed, in chronological order, and vary in format. Interviews with academic department program leaders and a review of the website revealed excellent progress in many departments. Those departments are commended for their hard work and progress in assessment. However, progress in assessment was not uniform across departments, and there was obviously a lack of understanding about the importance of closing the feedback loop and providing evidence of program improvement resulting from assessment.

Levels of Implementation and Importance of Increasing Implementation to 100%
There appear to be three levels of implementation of assessment. First, there is obvious strong commitment to assessment evidenced by application of effective, multiple measures and at least minimal evidence of program improvement. Second, there is some evidence of commitment to assessment and implementation of assessment measures but no evidence of any application toward program improvement. Third, evidence of commitment to assessment is lacking on the part of a few departments since they have failed to submit any plans and/or assessment data.

Assessment Conference Possibilities

2004 Assessment Institute in Indianapolis, October 31-November 2, 2004, University Place Conference Center & Hotel, Indianapolis, Indiana.

North Central Region: Exploring Best Practices in Continuous Quality Improvement for Higher Education, November 8-9, 2004, Phoenix, AZ.

Winter 2005 Professional Development Conference—Assessment: Informing Teaching, Learning, & Institutional Change, February 18-19, 2005, Sheraton Bloomington Hotel, Bloomington, MN.

ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

Dr. Robert A. Rutter
Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness
Main Hall, Room 208
Phone: (920) 403-3964
FAX (920) 403-4096
Email: bob.rutter@snc.edu

Institutional Effectiveness Team
Deborah Anderson (Phone 403-3199)
Jack Williamsen (Phone: 403-3993)
Ray Zurawski (Phone: 403-3202)

Office of Institutional Effectiveness
Patricia Wery, Administrative Assistant
Main Hall, Room 219 (Phone: 403-3855)
WEB SITE: www.snc.edu/oie

Senior administrators (the President and Vice President of Academic Affairs) demonstrated a high level of institutional commitment to assessment during discussions with the C-E (Consultant-Evaluator). The methods employed to create a campus culture of assessment, supported by the Title III grant, were described as positive in approach, providing information and support to faculty and staff through workshops, speakers, newsletters, programming, and personal encounters with the OIE and assessment committee personnel. The goal has been to persuade faculty and staff to embrace, develop, and implement assessment goals. Although administrators are reluctant to employ "heavy-handed," arbitrary penalties on faculty and staff that have failed to be supportive of assessment, several ideas were discussed regarding alternative strategies that may be effective.

Regardless of the tactics employed, non-responsive faculty and staff need to recognize the importance of having every department demonstrating use of assessment for program improvement before the focused visit in 2006. The Higher Learning Commission (HLC) has provided ample time and opportunity since 1995 for adequate communication, training, planning, experimentation, implementation, and revision of assessment to occur. St. Norbert College needs to understand the seriousness of continued failure to meet HLC assessment requirements and to respond accordingly. The OIE, its director, and the assessment committee have provided adequate resources and support. They have tried to convey the importance of achieving a viable, dynamic assessment plan that positively impacts program improvement. It may be time for administrative intervention.

The C-E suggests continuing to emphasize the importance and benefits of assessment and accreditation criteria as well as explaining the potential threat to academic freedom by government encroachment and/or intervention if institutions do not willingly assess themselves. Faculty and staff also need to understand the consequences of not fulfilling their assessment obligations before the focused visit occurs. If the focus visit team determines that insufficient progress has been made, it has the authority to recommend that a monitoring or progress report be required from the institution, which then becomes part of the institution's public record. Consequently, it is recommended that SNC adopt a fast track approach by establishing an aggressive calendar to quickly bring stragglers up to assessment standards.

Greater collaboration and showcasing of successful assessment efforts and demonstrated program improvements need to occur across departments. During the visit, it was obvious to the C-E that academic department representatives that met and shared what they were doing created interest and stimulated enthusiasm and creative thinking about assessment among their colleagues. Some were passionate about their assessment findings, and such passion is contagious. References were also made to helpful, unexpected findings that were discovered through assessment efforts. Faculty and staff need to hear these testimonials.

Assessment and St. Norbert's Mission
The four themes of the SNC mission enjoy a natural affinity to assessment, which in turn supports their successful achievement. For example, *community* is exemplified when faculty and staff enter collaborative partnerships to strengthen weaker departments and assist them to develop and implement assessment plans and improve their curricula. With regard to the second mission theme, *integrative learning*, assessment is a necessary

mission theme, integrative learning, assessment is a necessary component of any examination to provide evidence of its quality. Third, OIE data and assessment are also relevant to the campus community that regards the importance of effective *stewardship* of its resources. Assessment and program improvement begin the cycle of financial stewardship that leads to more available resources for students and programs, which in turn lead to more satisfied students, improved quality of current and new programs, increased retention of enrollees, attraction of new students, and greater revenue generation; thus the cycle continues. OIE supplies evidence regarding the fourth theme, *surroundings*, through student satisfaction measures and program assessments that attend to the adequacy of facilities. Institutional assessment plays a key role in insuring that the four strategic planning themes are achieved.

Assessment of Majors
A number of departments are using major field tests to evaluate the student-learning outcomes of their majors. The normative data provided has enabled them to demonstrate, in many cases, above average achievement of their majors. Smaller departments with few graduates annually that are accumulating data over time will eventually have reliable trends to benchmark their students' success. Departments that have developed their own assessments believe their measurements are better correlated with their curriculum, but they lack normative data to know how their majors compare nationally. HLC team members may challenge the validity and reliability of faculty-generated measurements. Several departments corroborate the results of their SNC-developed tests by occasionally administering parallel, standardized tests; this seems like a good compromise.

Assessment of General Education
The assessment of St. Norbert College's general education program presents several challenges. The first is due to the large number of study areas subsumed under the core. A systematic plan establishes when general studies' areas will be evaluated on a cycle. This will facilitate the plan's ongoing implementation and revision, but it must be closely monitored to insure all areas comply.

Closing the feedback loop is another important challenge for SNC. Many of the departments that have incorporated good performance levels need to fulfill the next step by interpreting their findings, identifying strategies toward program improvement, applying them, and evaluating the results for evidence of program improvement. It appears that additional time and effort needs to be devoted to helping faculty and staff understand both what is meant by closing the feedback loop and the significance of documenting program improvements resulting from assessment.

Another possible challenge that SNC may face regards its general education assessment plans for certain general studies skills that involve extensive use of course-embedded assessment. HLC team members will expect to see lasting, long-term evidence of general studies student-learning outcome competencies, that is those beyond the completion of specific short-term courses in the student's college experience. For example, SNC uses the CAAP to determine the level of critical thinking achieved by students. This is an example of summative evidence that is more convincing of long-term gains than would be a single course exam or

exercise. If faculty members measuring certain general studies stu-dent-learning outcomes continue to be wedded to course-embedded assessment, they should at least consider how to defend their use of it. Course-embedded assessment is challenged due to its perceived inability to measure long-term gains. Faculty need to be prepared to argue effectively that their essay assignments and exam questions are exemplary and sufficiently complex and sophisticated to be measur-ing higher order thinking skills --those internalized by students to the extent that they represent lifelong-learning skills enabling analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of all future information, i.e., a new way of thinking. Faculty will be called upon to make the case for course-embedded assessment.

The Master Document
and Evidence in Support of HLC Assessment Criteria
The Master Document with its format that provides examples of evi-dence at each of the HLC criteria levels is an excellent, dynamic strategy to convey SNC's assessment data. The C-E has two sugges-tions to improve its simplicity and, hopefully, its effectiveness. First, adding within the left column evaluative bullet statements that dem-onstrate examples of evidence for each criterion core component would effectively highlight the College's achievements, helping the evaluator to phrase supporting evidence for each criterion. Second, it is recommended that additional effort be given to simplifying the document for the reader. Organizing the right column by separating the many patterns of evidence for each component into logical cate-gories will make the document more user-friendly and readable. It is suggested that the evidence in the right column be stratified into sev-eral sub-columns either by type (general institutional, academic, stu-dent life, mission and heritage, etc.), strategic planning theme (community, integrative learning, stewardship, surroundings), chro-nology (calendar cycle), or some other defining characteristic. Team members will ask faculty, staff, and students about evaluation proc-esses and examples of evidence that SNC is meeting its stated expec-tations and fulfilling its mission. They should be familiar with the Master Document and with the evidence related to their areas of in-terest and responsibility.

There is excellent evidence of how assessment results inform im-provements in student services through use of Current Student Su r-vey and graphs demonstrating growth trends in four personal sphere developmental goals from freshman through senior year. Also, the focus group data are excellent and have been organized in such a way that shows increased sophistication of expression at the junior/senior level, in comparison with that at the freshman/sophomore level.

Program reviews are comprehensive and detailed, although few inte-grate evidence of student-learning outcomes in program review. It is wondered if faculty understands the relationship between succes s-fully demonstrating student-learning outcomes and evaluating pro-gram effectiveness.

Editors Note: To access the Master Document which identifies the current Higher Learning Commission accreditation criteria related to assessment and presents SNC's evidence of compliance go to www.snc.edu/oie/secure/new_criteria_for_ accreditation.html.

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Student Affairs Assessment Seminar
June 15-17, 2004
Report by Jack Williamsen

(Sponsored & Financially Supported by the
Office of Institutional Effectiveness)

Seminar Content
The Student Affairs Assessment Seminar, sponsored by the Center for the Study of Higher Education at The Pennsylvania State University, was held at the Kellogg Conference Center of Gallaudet University, June 15-17.

The primary focus (and conference time) of the seminar was on the application and implementation of the assessment model (the "Ten Step Matrix") of John Schuh and Lee Upcraft. Two CDs were pro-vided, one for general assessment in the area of student life, and the other more specifically devoted to student learning outcomes. "Hands on" sessions with both CDs, interspersed with commentary sessions on assessment in student life, comprised the majority of the presenta-tions.

In addition to Schuh and Upcraft, there were other "faculty," inclu d-ing Patrick Terenzini. Charles Schroeder gave an excellent Power-Point explication of the Nine *Principles of Good Practice for Assess-ing Student Learning*.

The seminar was limited in size; about 95 persons were in attendance.

Comment and "Back Home" Implications
The Schuh and Upcraft CDs are useful step-by-step guides that are general enough to extend their usefulness to virtually any office or group at the College wishing to draft an assessment plan. They might be suggested for that purpose when the OIE gets requests of "how-do-we-begin" variety.

The seminar seemed to be designed for professionals just beginning assessment (a kind of "Assessment 101"). I was looking for more ad-vanced materials, particularly in the area of broad (mission-based) affective learning outcomes. Although I was relatively unsuccessful in that enterprise, I did have useful discussions with a colleague from Holy Cross and another attendee from a small Texas Christian college on the topic (as well as 'picking the brains' of seminar faculty re: pos-sible leads).

My impression is that any institution (with the possible exception of Alverno) who is conducting assessment of these outcomes is doing so in relative obscurity and is not yet widely recognized in assessment circles. There seems to be no obvious leader here. And, as far as I can determine at this point, no institution is approaching the assessment of broadly-stated affective learning outcomes the way we are at St. Nor-bert, integrating survey and focus group evidence to clarify the con-ceptual understanding of these outcomes and plan interventions based on this understanding. We should begin to publicize our efforts.

Personal Sphere
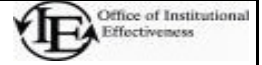
Q 40: *"Which one best describes an important goal for you this year"*

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Obtain the best grades I can	40%	50%	41%	31%
Learn to balance academic and social life	36%	26%	17%	18%
Make new friends with different backgrounds	2%	1%	3%	4%
Take courses that prepare me for my career after colle	16%	20%	60%	32%
Become more independent and self-sufficient	7%	4%	10%	16%
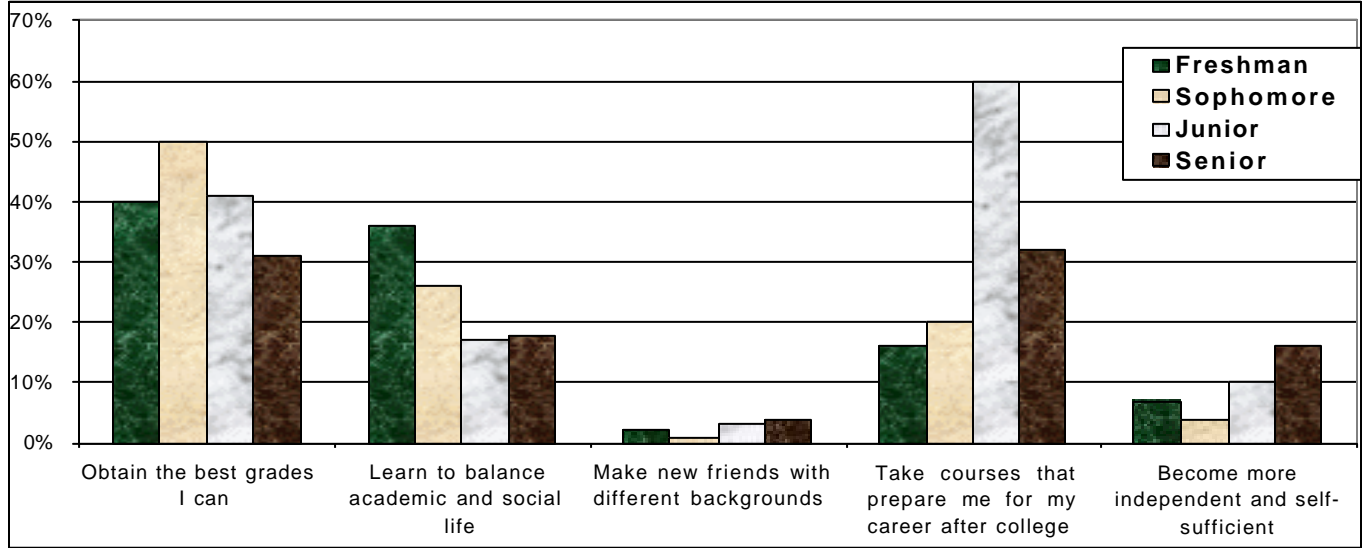
Q 40: *"Which one best describes an important goal for you this year"*

|	Male	Female
Obtain the best grades I can	42%	39%
Learn to balance academic and social life	27%	25%
Make new friends with different backgrounds	3%	1%
Take courses that prepare me for my career after college	20%	25%
Become more independent and self-sufficient	7%	10%
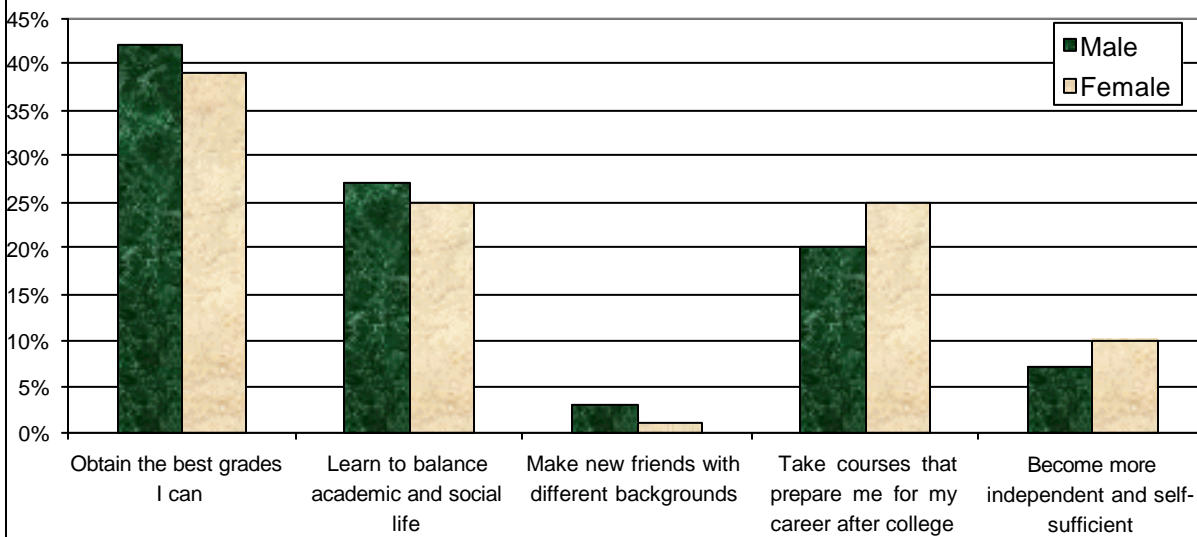
It. Norbert Students Speak...

Hours/Week: Studying
Baled on 1256 Respondents
CllTent Stlldent Survey

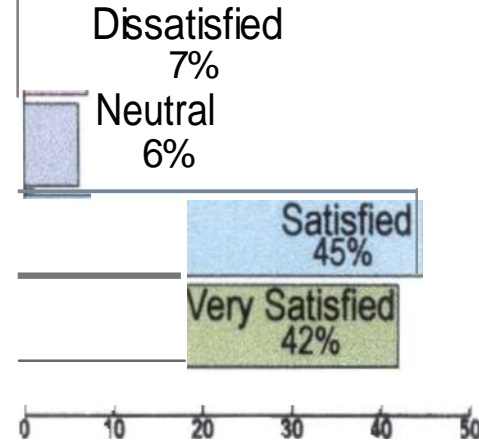20+ 10%
1-5 22%
16-20 16%
11-15 21%
6-10 31%
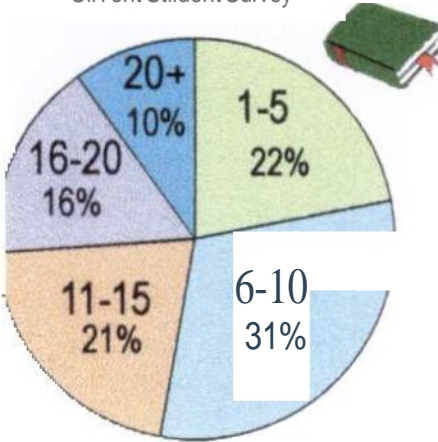
Let Your Students Know What THEY Think
The OIE has an extensive library of student responses to surveys (freshmen, senior, and in-between) for you
We would be custom graphic selected and tailored just for the needs of your program or academic discipline.
Call Jack Williamsen @x3993 to see how we can help.

Satisfaction with Major
Baaed on 12(3 Respondents
200SCuntnt Student Survey

Dissatisfied 7%
Neutral 6%
Satisfied 45%
Very Satisfied 42%

0 10 20 30 40 50

The Four PersonalSphere Developmental Goals
SNC Current Student SurveylClasses entering 1996-1999
Gal hel'Soine/Great Extent'

98
90
J a8
j•0
li 78
cf 70
85
80

— Persona Goals
-Self-Worth
Self-Understancing
Relatlonshps
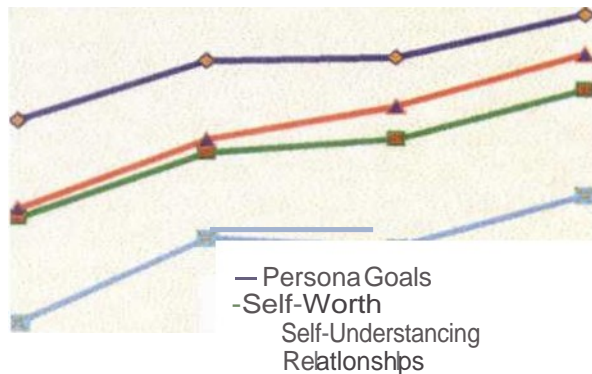
When do nongraduating students leave SNC?
Percent of total leaving by the end of each year.

Jr./Sr. Years 20%
Freshman Year 55%
Sophomore Year 25%