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# INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Volume 1, Issue 3

April 8, 2002

## Work on Assessment...? Me? You've Got to be Kidding!

By Ray Zurawski

The prospect of working on assessment strikes many of us as daunting, perhaps even overwhelming, particularly as we approach this extremely busy time of the academic year. As an antidote to these feelings, consider the following parable.

My 'seventy-something' father-in-law is an excellent golfer who graciously offered the following advice as I struggled to learn the game, finding the learning curve to be steeper than I had anticipated: "...Succeeding at golf is simply a matter of advancing the ball toward the hole, no matter how slightly, with each successive stroke..." As one who discovered on the driving range that it is indeed possible to hit a golf ball laterally and even backwards, I was not altogether impressed with this characterization. Nevertheless, in time I have come to appreciate its wisdom and to see its applicability to other endeavors, including assessment.

With relatively little time and effort, any of us, no matter how far (or near) along we are, can make at least some progress in our assessment efforts. What follows is a list of suggested activities to help you "advance the ball toward the hole, no matter how slightly." Some of the activities can be accomplished on your own, perhaps over a cup of coffee. Others might be better undertaken with a discipline colleague or two. Items presented earlier on the list might be appropriate for those "farthest from the hole" (in early stages of assessment efforts). The activities appearing later in the

## General Education Student Learning Outcome Statements

### The results are in...

On pages 5-6 you will find a list of draft learning outcome statements for the General Education Program at St. Norbert College. These were developed through a multi-stage process undertaken this semester. The process began with a workshop on writing learning outcomes statements which was open to the entire campus community. A subset of the workshop attendees participated in a second workshop focussed on drafting possible outcomes statements for all general studies areas. With one exception, all Gs areas were represented. Outcomes statements for Gs 2 were developed and reviewed by the entire Philosophy Discipline during a regularly scheduled discipline meeting.

Possible learning outcomes statements for each Gs area were then sent to all faculty teaching in that area for review. Members of the General Education and Honors Committee, the Dean, and former Associate Academic Dean were asked to review all of the outcomes statements. Faculty were asked to answer two questions for each possible outcomes statement. Was the statement an appropriate student learning outcome for the faculty members course? Of those proposed, which one or two statements best reflect the intended learning outcomes for this Gs area? Responses to these questions were tabulated and used to identify one or two generally agreed upon outcomes statements. These will be used to develop a pilot general education assessment plan.

### Inside this issue:

Work on Assessment...? Me? You've Got to be Kidding!	2
General Education Student Learning Outcome Statements The Results are in .....	3
Assessment Funds Still Available	4
General Education Student Learning Outcome Statements	5-6

### UPCOMING EVENTS:

- **Assessment of General Education and Values Assessment in Higher Education Workshop:** April 11-12, 2002.
- **SNC General Education Assessment Workshop w/Dr. James Nicholas** Workshop on April 15, 2002.
- **St. Norbert College Freshmen: Thirty Year Trends** College Community Meeting, 12 p.m. Friday, April 26, 2002, Sensenbrenner Lounge.
- **AAHE Assessment Conference,** June 20-23, 2002, Boston.

## Work on Assessment...? Me? You've Got to be Kidding!

(Continued from Page 1)

list might be more appropriate for those "on the green" or "hitting an approach shot".

### 1. Peruse the items on the ongoing surveys administered to SNC students.

Professionally developed surveys are administered at SNC annually to incoming students, continuing students, and graduating seniors, and on a lengthier cycle to alumni. Contact the OIE for copies of these. You will find a number of items that tap students' satisfaction with various aspects of your major program.

### 2. Write one specific, measurable learning outcome statement appropriate for your program.

If your discipline has developed an assessment plan that articulates only a mission statement and broad goals, you should work to identify at least one specific objective. Think about what you would most like your students to know, to be able to do, or to value or appreciate as a result of completing your program. Help is available if you need specific examples that might be appropriate for programs such as yours.

### 3. If you have articulated a number of specific learning objectives, prioritize them.

Which objective addresses your most pressing concern about students' learning? In what areas do you believe your program is most successful? Least successful?

### 4. If you have singled out one crucial learning objective but have not yet identified a method of measuring your progress, peruse the existing data.

Here again, consult the OIE. We will review any of the existing SNC survey data that might be relevant to your learning objectives and provide you with a summary report.

### 5. If you are somewhat wary of survey data and/or quantitative methods, talk to your students.

Ask representative groups of your majors (in or outside of class) to describe the best features of your major program and the features needing improvement. Ask them whether they believe they know, can do, and value the things you want them to know, do, and value.

### 6. Wondering what to do now that you've taken a preliminary look at the findings? Answer the following question: does this evidence suggest we're doing (a) 'way

better than good enough,' (b) 'good enough,' or (c) 'not good enough?'

### 7. If you answered (a) or (b) to Item #6 above, tell someone.

Decide who should be told (students, parents, faculty, administrators, the Office of Admissions, etc) and decide how best to inform them.

### 8. If you answered (c) to Item # 6 above, discuss why this may have occurred and what might be done to improve the situation.

### 9. If you have been gathering assessment data for some time but have not yet acted on it, then take a preliminary step toward "closing the loop."

Review the data that have been gathered, and try to identify at least one improvement that could be made in your major program based on the findings. Even if you cannot implement the change at present, attempt to articulate a timetable for doing so and any necessary budget or staffing issues.

The suggestions listed above should help persuade you that you needn't be a master of technical or quantitative skills to make progress on assessment, and that even small steps can provide important information. Should your initial efforts seem to you to be feeble ones, remember, there is always the next hole, the next course, and the next year.

## American Association for Higher Education 2002 Assessment Conference Boston, MA June 20-23, 2002

SNC will send a team of four to this conference. All expenses will be paid by the OIE. Three participants have been determined, the fourth is open to any interested faculty or student life staff.



## General Education Student Learning Outcome Statements

(Continued from Page 1)

Thirty-five faculty responded, having reviewed possible learning outcomes for one or more Gs areas (many faculty teach in more than one Gs area). The number of faculty reviewing each area appears in the inset. Most of the proposed outcome statements received some support. In most areas, four or five statements were identified by a majority of the reviewers as appropriate outcomes for their course. Only a few were not checked by anyone, indicating that the proposed statement was not an appropriate outcome for courses taught by the reviewers.

Identification of the one or two statements which best reflect SNC's intended learning outcomes for each Gs area varied more widely with clear consensus in some areas and little consensus in others. There appeared to be clear consensus for the two statements listed for areas 1, 3, 5, 10, writing, values, and critical thinking. There was also strong consensus for the two area 7 statements, but the fact that language courses at various levels can be used to fulfill this requirement makes it difficult to apply these statements to all Gs 7 courses. It is not clear whether we can develop outcomes statements that apply to all Gs 7 courses. In areas 4, 6 and 12, there appeared to be strong consensus for one statement, but weak support for a second. Although the statements listed for areas 8, Upper 1, and 11 received the most support, there appeared to be little consensus about which statements best reflect the program's intent. This could be readily addressed by bringing faculty in these areas together to discuss student learning outcomes.

These learning outcomes statements are not final. Acknowledging that the entire SNC community has an interest in a strong vital general studies program, we now invite comment on the proposed outcomes statements from the entire faculty. We expect to continue to refine these intended learning outcomes even after the pilot assessment plan has been developed and implemented. The fact that the outcomes statements for some areas were reviewed by a relatively small number and that the statements for some areas do not reflect strong consensus suggests the need for continuing discussion. We hope this will occur both formally and informally. Several colleagues have remarked that trying to identify student learning outcomes for general studies has been provocative, refreshing, and useful. Achieving greater specificity regarding what we want students to know, be able to do, and value as a result of a SNC education can help renew our belief in the centrality and importance of academics.

Comments on the list of proposed student learning outcome statements for the SNC general education program can be sent to Bob Rutter or Kristee Boehm.

### NUMBER REVIEWING PROPOSED LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR EACH GS AREA

GS AREA	NUMBER
Gs 1	8
Gs 2	Entire discipline
Gs 3	6
Gs 4	7
Gs 5	8
Gs 6	4
Gs 7	10
Gs 8	8
Gs 1	7
Gs 10	6
Gs 11	7
Gs 12	5
Writing	35
Values	34
Critical Thinking	34

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## **General Education Student Learning Outcome Statements**

### **Area 1 (Lower Biennium): Religious Studies**

- Students will be able to recognize major themes and issues in Judeo-Christian theology.
- Students will demonstrate facility in applying critical tools to the analysis of religious texts and theological themes.

### **Area 2: Human Nature**

- Students will gain a thematic and historical understanding of the philosophy of human nature.
- Students will improve their critical thinking and writing skills.

### **Area 3: Human Relationships**

- Students will be able to apply (critically evaluate) the concepts, perspectives and methods of at least one of the Social Science disciplines to the understanding of at least two significant social problems.
- Students will be able to identify and summarize the major theoretical orientations and research methodologies of at least one social/behavioral science.

### **Area 4: Natural Science**

- Students will experience (become aware of) the various methods used in studying the subject matter of the Natural Sciences.
- Students will understand scientific theories and perspectives.

### **Area 5: Creative Expression**

- Students will acquire a lifelong habit of experiencing art/music/literature/theatre, will be aware of the importance of the fine arts in a world of routine, and will recognize how the fine arts provide a perspective on the everyday world.
- Students will acquire the skills to analyze, compare, and evaluate works of fine art. Most often these skills require development of writing skills.

### **Area 6: United States Heritage**

- Students will understand the roles of US political and cultural institutions and how they apply to contemporary issues.
- Students will understand the diversity of US historical understanding.

### **Area 7: Foreign Heritage**

- Students will be able to analyze a past or current historical/cultural practice or event through the perspective of a heritage other than their own.
- Students will be able to describe important historical or cultural events and practices in a region of the world other than their own.

### **Language-specific outcomes**

- Students will demonstrate reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills in the second language at a level appropriate to the course taken (novice, intermediate, advanced).

**Area 8: Quantitative Skills**

- Students will be able to use logically organized methods to solve quantitative problems.
- Students will be able to represent quantitative information symbolically, visually, verbally and numerically. Further, students will be able to transform quantitative information from one form to another form and solve problems using a combination of these methods.

**Area 1 (Upper Biennium): Religious Studies**

- Students will be able to identify and evaluate their own moral and religious convictions in conversation with the Catholic Christian heritage.
- Students will be able to articulate how religious traditions shape and reflect current social practices.

**Area 10: Western Tradition**

- Students will be able to identify major concepts and values present in Western Culture.
- Students will be able to analyze how Western values influence contemporary thought or actions.

**Area 11: Global Society**

- Students will gain a clearer perspective on the US through other peoples' views of US behaviors.
- Students will be able to identify and analyze examples of interrelationships between countries and peoples.

**Area 12: Senior Colloquium**

- Students will demonstrate the ability to draw from diverse disciplines to address significant questions, issues, and themes.
- Students will appreciate the value of a multidisciplinary, integrative approach to solving problems.

**Writing Skills**

- Students will use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating.
- Students will demonstrate effective use of syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

**Values**

- Students will be able to critically reflect upon values statements.
- Students will be able to articulate, reflect upon, and anticipate implications of their own values.

**Critical Thinking**

- Students will be able to reach conclusions by means of deductive or inductive reasoning.
- Students will be able to evaluate the validity of conclusions drawn from different perspectives.

## Assessment Funds Still Available

Assessment projects funded by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness since the last newsletter include:

**Biology:** To administer the major field exam in biology to majors graduating in 2002. Dr. Debra Anderson, Associate Professor of Biology, will oversee this project.

**Health Center:** To administer the National College Health Assessment to SNC students and use the data to analyze a wide range of college student health issues, and the ways they relate to the development and success of SNC students. Barbara Bloomer, Director of Health Services, will coordinate this project.

**Senior CIRP:** To fund administration of the Senior CIRP (Cooperative Institutional Research Program). Cynthia Barnett, Associate Dean of Student Life, will oversee this project.

**Follow-up on First Semester Departures:** To conduct phone interviews with newly admitted freshmen who left SNC after the first semester to determine their reasons for leaving. This study will utilize the Withdrawing/Nonreturning Student Survey developed by ACT. The data will be used to inform the College's retention efforts. Dr. Robert Rutter, Director of Institutional Effectiveness, will oversee this project.

**Psychology:** To support the participation of Drs. Raymond Zurawski and Stuart Korshavn in a conference entitled "Best Practices in Assessment: A Conference for Educators and Administrators in Psychology".

**Teacher Education:** To develop a strategy for collecting evidence of graduate success as mandated by PI 34. This strategy is likely to include some interview and on-site observation. In addition, this project will analyze data collected since 1995, establish a teacher education data base, and support participation in the ETS workshop which will establish the Wisconsin Certification Test cut-off scores. Dr. Reid Riggle, Associate Professor of Education, will coordinate this project.

**Political Science:** To administer the major field exam in political science to majors graduating in 2002. Dr. David Wegge, Professor of Political Science, will oversee this project.

**Additional:** Conversations have taken place with and proposals (or expanded proposals) are anticipated from Career Services, English, International Studies, and Business Administration. Additional proposals are encouraged. Because of some delayed hiring in the OIE, almost all proposals meeting the guidelines should be fundable this year. A copy of the "Request for Funds to Support Assessment Activities"

was included in the February newsletter. Additional copies are available from Pat Wery (x3855) in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness

## LSI & OIE Co-Sponsor Teleconference

Leadership, Service, and Involvement hosted a 3 hour teleconference entitled "The First Year of College: Assessing What Matters" on April 4th. Sixteen student life staff and faculty participated with a follow-up retreat being considered for summer.

Assessment experts Thomas Angelo, Associate Provost for Teaching and Learning at the University of Akron, Cecilia Lopez, Associate Director of the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association, Linda Suskie, Director of Assessment at Towsen University, and Randy Swing, Co-Director, Policy Center on the First Year of College at Brevard College appeared as discussants. Their topics included developing an assessment plan based on what is valued, the learning/assessment connection, assessment for program improvement, available tools, and developing a culture of evidence. The 44 page Conference Resource Packet contains helpful information related to these topics.

A copy of the Resource Guide and/or a tape of the teleconference is available to interested members of the SNC community through Tami Klumppan (x4023) or Pat Wery (x3855).

### St. Norbert College Freshmen: Thirty Year Trends

**College Community Meeting**  
**12:00 p.m. Friday, April 26, 2002**  
**Sensenbrenner Lounge**

Using data drawn from the Freshmen CIRP, Dr. Jack Williamson and Jason Johnson (accounting major) from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, will examine how incoming freshmen have changed over the last 30 years.