

Assessment Report Summaries: Revised Assessment Model 2019-2020

Accounting

In ACC216, there currently are two main strategies for assessing the improvement in the students' ability to communicate in writing: 1) an analysis of the revised assignments, and 2) analysis of student responses to a comprehensive, course-specific, detailed (6-page) exit assessment. Analysis of the data indicates that there is significant improvement between the first and second drafts of every paper. Furthermore, there is sustained improvement from the early papers to the late-semester papers. Because the data indicates significant improvement across all three sections from the beginning to the end of the semester, the revision policy and process will not change. There is also evidence that there is learning that transfers from one assignment to the next, even though each assignment targets slightly different features of business writing. The responses to the questions asking students to evaluate whether their writing improved over the course of the semester are all quite similar. The general subjective perception seems to be that the course is successfully improving student's writing. Consequently, the course will continue to evolve in response to features the students request (such as the addition of an option to write a "complaint" letter), but the overall approach to teaching students to write with clarity, conciseness, audience awareness, organization, and critical thinking will remain the same.

Biology

Over the past year, the Department of Biology conducted an evaluation of the newly implemented approaches to the Biology 101 and Biology 102 introductory courses. The major changes included breaking the one lecture section into multiple, smaller sections of approximately 20 students, affording each instructor the opportunity to better engage the students with a variety of active learning techniques that were impossible before. The learning goals of content and application were assessed, via a direct measure of student performance utilizing a pre- and post- exam series, and these suggested that the students acquired an improved understanding of the course content relative to the years before. In addition, in response to a questionnaire, students overall indicated a positive attitude toward the course and their ability to learn the course content and as well as a positive experience with the active learning approaches. Overall, the data indicate that the efforts taken by the Department of Biology have been successful not only in promoting student learning but student retention within the major. While we will need to continue this assessment to acquire data beyond a single year, we believe that we have made great strides toward meaningful improvement of our curriculum. With this information, going forward, the Department of Biology will 1) continue to make nuanced changes to this newly established first year curriculum and 2) build on the approaches of the first-year experiences as we transition our efforts to the second year curriculum.

Chemistry

The chemistry department is carrying out direct assessment of student learning through the incorporation of tracked questions in exams, quizzes, and assignments. This will allow us to look at the trajectory of individual students on their performance throughout the chemistry sequence. At this point in time, our new assessment strategy is in its infancy. Because we are tracking individual students throughout their four academic years, we anticipate that it will take 4-6 years to begin to gather data that will inform the direction of our efforts to improve student performance.

Computer Science

The Computer Science (CS) department administers a standardized test – the Major Field Test, developed by ETS – to all graduating seniors each year. This test provides an overall score for the department as well as subscores of three content areas that we can compare to other departments who administered the test. Two factors that complicate assessment are the small sample sizes and high variability in instruction quality. This year, we had 12 graduating seniors, and the majority of courses in the major have been taught by visiting and adjunct faculty during their time here. Therefore, drawing meaningful conclusions from the results is difficult, but we look for any consistency and trends in the data. This year, our results show a continuation of a recent series of low scores in two areas and a large drop in a third in which our students have traditionally scored well. Possible explanations are 1) random noise, 2) less-prepared students entering the major, and 3) poor quality instruction. The first is a given, we have no data regarding the second, and the third is the only one at all under our control. We have taken the steps of hiring an additional tenure-track instructor and increasing oversight and mentoring for instructors in the department.

Environmental Studies

Our unit investigated the acquisition of knowledge in earth science and in the relationship between human beings, society and the environment, among ES majors. We found that ES majors' knowledge in both areas improved. Our analysis suggested that one of our pre-test/post-test questions may be poorly worded, which may account for the contradictory assessment results for goal 3. We also found that students were extremely confident about their knowledge of the relationship between human beings, society and the environment, and, over time, confident about their knowledge of earth science. ES has used this data to update our StrAP and will also use it to improve our assessment instruments.

Finance

Using a grading rubric that included grammar, writing clarity and business writing style, students in FIS 409's three main papers were assessed at the first draft and the final draft. In addition to being evaluated by the professor, the final papers are assessed by the professionals on the Client Board, who evaluate the students' arguments and make suggestions for improvement. The improvement in grammar, writing clarity and business writing style were looked at by the Professor who taught the class and graded the Rubric. The improvement in the results is greatly due to Prof. Holly Hughey coming into class to explain the difference between academic and business writing styles as well as numerous revisions by the students following feedback from the Professor. This iterative approach appears to be working well and consequently, the class will continue it. The feedback from the Client Board was that the final papers would benefit more from visual aids. Consequently, the Professor created a "tear sheet" to go along with the summaries sent to the client board for the 2019-2020 academic year to see if this meets their approval. The oral communication skills were considered adequate by the Client Board in this indirect metric. At this point, we see no need to change anything with this goal as a result of the positive feedback.

Nursing

Two direct measures of student learning used within the School of Nursing are the NCLEX-RN® first time pass rates and critical thinking as measured by changes in the pre and post California Critical Thinking Disposition Inventory (CCTDI) scores from first year to graduation. The emphasis on improving test writing skills continued in the Fall 2017 retreat held on August 7, 2017 in which NCLEX-RN expert Cathi Kaesburg Corbin devoted the day to improving faculty's ability to focus on analysis and application style questions to write NCLEX-RN style questions in individual nursing courses. The outcome of the retreats was aimed at developing and implementing reliable and valid multiple choice exam questions across the curriculum. All faculty were involved in designing the revised preparatory program and consensus was reached to continue the HESI/Saunders Online Review for the NCLEX-RN® program. Each year, including in the 2018-2019 academic year (and planned for the 2019-2020 academic year), faculty review data provided by HESI that compare our student' performance on HESI Pharm (November) and HESI E2 (January) to national averages of undergraduate students, and use those reports to modify emphasis on course content and on course exam questions. Ongoing discussion of the impact of adding language to assignments that promote critical thinking in each clinical course is addressed in Faculty Course Evaluations completed for each course. Consensus was reached by the School of Nursing to continue using the CCTDI (as the only direct measure assessment available with nursing data) while adding course assignments that promote critical thinking. An example implemented in Fall of 2019 is a math competency/medication administration assignment across all 3 levels of nursing curricula.

Political Science

This year's target was to see whether students are "able to communicate research findings and arguments in a clear, logical, and persuasive manner" based on a team reading of a collection of short papers. We used a three-point scale to score the papers, ranging from under-developed, to developing, to mastery. As part of our spring 2018 assessment efforts, we noted the need to integrate more assignments at the 200- and 300-levels that ask students to synthesize multiple and competing perspectives. We also noted the need to give particular attention to underlying assumptions and implications. While the group expressed approval of this particular assignment, it's possible that the space limitations embodied in the assignment lead students to write a little less than they otherwise might have. Finally, reading these papers generated a useful conversation about how students succeed (or not) at writing abstracts. At least one member of the department who has not done much in the way of teaching how to write an abstract reported that he will work on this in the future.

Psychology

This past year we assessed the following student learning goals: the learning of key concepts in our psychology 100 class, the ability to critically think about and applying psychological principles related to research design and analysis, as well as principles applying psychological outcomes to everyday life and social situation in the context of appropriately using ethics to understand the limitations of psychological knowledge. The data suggests students were successfully exposed to a psychology curriculum that demonstrates these learning goals. Direct measures from the introductory level course in psychology suggest students demonstrated knowledge of most subfields in Psychology. Indirect measures from a senior student exit survey and a survey of faculty teaching and updating our Statistics course in the department also suggest students have been exposed to a consistent level of instruction regarding the critical analysis, interpretation, reporting, and execution of scientific inquiry within the science of psychology.

Sociology

We now have two different instructors who teach SOC 290: History of Social Thought, in a rotation that is designed to make it so that no one instructor is teaching more than one writing intensive course per semester. While we feel that we share goals and have developed similar (though not identical) courses, we wanted to assess the learning outcomes of our students in each course. The full-time instructors who were teaching introductory-level courses in 17-18 together developed a 5-question multiple choice quiz (see Appendix C) that evaluates the existence (pass/fail) of tangible outcomes present in our 5 concept competencies. While we were not able to answer the question for which we designed our assessment this year, we know that at least one of the theory courses is meeting core sociological competencies, and thus that our students are getting consistent education reflecting core sociological learning goals in both our introductory and one theory course. Since the instructors teaching theory feel that they are teaching comparable courses, we feel reasonably confident that we are meeting these goals across our theory courses.

Theatre Arts

At SoTA's annual all school jury event, which takes place every January, every student in the School of Theatre Arts presents work samples to a faculty panel. These panelists evaluate individual students, and critical commentary is shared with each student to guide and enhance individual growth. Data is gathered by an individual program assessment designee, and analyzed by the SoTA faculty. It can then be implemented as lessons during the next calendar year to address any identified deficiencies in student learning outcomes and close the loop.

BFA Music Theatre

The raw data, as expected, illustrates students are progressing through the various aspects of the program growing reasonably toward mastery. Within context, the scores didn't indicate a functional issue within the program that needed to be addressed. The only surprise was that the first year as a cohort showed better than traditionally when looking at this one aspect of performance. Although the senior class did not quite meet the range of 5-6 on our scale, we remain impressed by them for the amount of growth they achieved over their four years. More discussions were provoked in looking at individual outliers than programmatic gaps this year.

BA in Theatre Arts

The BA program is in flux. The track has not had a designated tenure line to head the curriculum for several years. Consequently, our BA degree lacks focus that could help our students create pathways to explore theatre and the world. The School of Theatre Arts is currently conducting a search for a tenure line faculty hire to help stabilize, guide, shape and build this vital degree.

BFA Design/Technology

The Design/Tech faculty has identified the need for enhanced training for the verbal, live feedback that takes place with auditors and prospective employers in the profession. To address this, instructors have increased relevant content in the weekly Design/Tech master class, which heretofore has focused on the generation of strong visual work, but has not offered any depth work on professional presentation.

BFA Acting

On our six-point scale, seniors would be expected to come in at a level of 5 or 6. Our three seniors came in at an average of 4.3. Two of these students devoted considerable time during their senior year to aspects of theatre outside of their performance degree. Our two juniors seem to be on track, averaging 4.5. This is not an inappropriate level for third year students, as they have not completed all of the upper division performance courses which get to the heart of this attribute. Our four sophomores averaged 2.8, a lower level on the continuum. And our nine freshmen averaged 2.7, which is an acceptable level for this attribute.