

# CIE UPDATE

The Center for Institutional Effectiveness

Spring 2014 • Issue 5

## Moments in Assessment History Part II: The New Accountability

The latter part of the 1980s furthered the national dialogue on assessment. In 1988, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) released *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century*. Like the 1986 report *To Secure the Blessings of Liberty* which preceded it, the AACJC report underscored the need for institution-wide student outcomes and determinations of institutional effectiveness.

Persistent themes run through the national reports of the 1980s. One theme calls for institutions to clarify their missions, other calls are for the development of institutional effectiveness indicators and an evaluation of program quality.

In 1990, "National Education Goals" are announced by the president and adopted by the governors. The 1992 *Report of the Task Force on Assessing the National Goal Relating to Postsecondary Education* calls for the development of a national sample-based assessment system. It calls for colleges to assess student skills on entry, assess student progress toward meeting their goals, assess the outcomes of educational experiences on exit and beyond, assess educational programs on cost, quality and need, and assess whether institutions are operating in the most productive manner possible. These components make-up what will become to be termed the "New Accountability."

Pressure stemming from several nationally recognized reports on the condition of education led, in some states, to state mandated assessment requirements. Most states, however, chose to participate in initiatives that resulted from statewide coordinating and governing boards. The general philosophy behind these governing boards was that it is better for higher education to monitor itself than to be regulated by others.

Demands for comprehensive models to address student learning and evaluate institutions will increase as the country moves through the 1990s and the early 21st century. As many higher education scholars of the period are quoted as saying, the "A" word has come to mean not only assessment, but also accountability.

## Speaking the Same Language: A Glossary of Assessment Terms

**ASSESSMENT:** One way of viewing assessment is considering it a more narrowly focused form of evaluation. The two processes are similar but not identical. Evaluation is more comparative and prescriptive. It is a process that assists in making informed judgments about the extent to which a program is accomplishing what it sets out to accomplish as well as to inform judgments about values or qualities of a program. In contrast, one goal of assessment, particularly as used in higher education, is improvement of student learning. By extension, it can also be used to improve teaching practice, or the way class content is delivered. Assessments are completed in cycles and are thus ongoing undertakings involving a number of individuals and related activities.

**OUTCOMES:** The term "outcomes" refers to the results of instruction. Consideration is not given to the process, which produced the outcome. When discussing assessment, the term "outcome(s)" most often refers to "student learning outcomes" or measurable statements about attitudes, knowledge, thinking processes and skills acquired by students through learning experience(s) being assessed.

**DATA:** Data refers to evidence used in assessment procedures and exists in two forms, quantitative and qualitative. Both types are valuable.

- *Quantitative data* is information presented in numerical form regardless of its size. Data are commonly presented as tables and graphs, averages and total sums. Quantitative data presentations are generally seen as objective, even neutral, representations of evidence gathered.
- *Qualitative data* is non-numerical evidence in the form of descriptions or narratives. Such data is presented as stories, dialog, or explanations with little to no numerical support. Its intent is often to reflect participants' experiences. Evidence presented in this format often involves relatively few cases and information tends to be quite focused. When qualitative data is used, the researcher is generally interested in capturing perspectives of those involved in events examined.

When assessment of student learning is the goal, both quantitative and qualitative techniques are useful and complimentary tools. As we work toward understanding what issues must be addressed and collect snapshots of student performance, we will utilize combinations of these approaches to data collection. Quantitative techniques are likely to allow insight into "what is going on" with regard to student learning while qualitative techniques will help us answer questions of "why" one student does well while another does not.



## Encouraging & Supporting Campus Wide Involvement in Improving Institutional Effectiveness

The CIE Assessment team recently attended a conference in Philadelphia titled, "Encouraging & Supporting Campus Wide Involvement in Improving Institutional Effectiveness." One concept that was addressed was selecting the area to assess. The intended outcome needs to be connected to the institutional mission, and the assessment project selected should have a high importance to the college.

So how does one select an area to assess? At the conference, the presenter Andrea A. Lex presented the idea of "Value to Effort Ratio" in which an assessment idea is evaluated on the value to the college compared to the effort to complete the assessment project. She emphasized that if an assessment project is determined to have "high importance to the college" and has a "high capacity for feasibility," then one should "do it." If the project is determined to have a "high importance to the college," but a "low capacity for feasibility" then it is worth rethinking the strategy and scale of the project. Consequently, if a project is determined to have a "low importance to the college" and has a "low capacity for feasibility" or a "low importance to the college" and a "high capacity for feasibility," the project should be dismissed or redesigned accordingly.

But how does one choose a project that has maximum value with high feasibility? There are many factors to consider. Is the project connected to the institutional mission? Are the resources and personnel that a department has available sufficient to complete the project? Can the data be gathered? Can the change be carried out with the staff available? Can the project be carried out within the timeline given for the completion of the project? If you look at assessment ideas using the "high impact and high feasibility" factor, you will be better able to accomplish your department's assessment endeavors.

## THE LEARNING ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

This past year, Learning Assessment Committee (LAC) members approved a Mission and Charge statement to help guide the work of the committee. The committee also focused on means to insure an even quality of assessment reports, the General Education Assessment project and the Middle States Self-Study.

In the spring, a group of LAC members attended a Middle States workshop, "Understanding and Using Student Learning Assessment Results." At the March LAC meeting, those attendees shared what they learned at the workshop. One exercise, "Identifying Assessment Purposes and Audiences," encouraged the LAC to view assessment as important to many audiences.

The LAC hopes other faculty will be able to attend assessment workshops next year and that the "assessment conversation" continues.

## Middle States Update

This semester has been pivotal in the development of Bergen's Self-Study, a decennial process to reaffirm regional accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. In December 2013, the Executive Team chose a comprehensive model to address Middle States' 14 Standards of Excellence. President Walter asked Dr. Yun Kim and Prof. Sony Tiwari to serve as the Self-Study co-chairs.

Faculty, staff, administrators and board members were invited to serve on the Steering Committee. The Committee's initial responsibilities included the completion of a Self-Study design and the organization of working groups to address the 14 Standards. Each working group will conduct research over the next 12 months and submit reports by May 2015. The Steering Committee will use these reports to write a Self-Study draft.

On March 6, the College welcomed Middle States staff-liaison Dr. Ellie Fogarty to the main campus in Paramus. Throughout the day, Dr. Fogarty met with the Steering Committee and working groups to discuss the Self-Study design and held open forums for the entire College to attend. The Steering Committee was pleased to receive Dr. Fogarty's enthusiastic approval of the Self-Study design, a promising indication of what should prove to be a successful Self-Study process.

## General Education Assessment

In fall 2013, the General Education Committee assessed the General Education program for the first time. Faculty were invited to submit student artifacts that they felt represented critical or creative thinking, and/or oral and written communication skills. A General Education Assessment Committee, using rubrics from the LEAP Essential Learning Outcomes, evaluated the work of students who had a minimum of 45 credits. Submissions included 75 artifacts from Art, Biology, Literature, Philosophy & Religion and Psychology.

This pilot project was very informative. In addition to giving us a snapshot of our students' abilities, we were able to look for consistency, as well as strengths and weaknesses in student learning and in the assessment process itself. Moreover, assessing across the curriculum let us learn about our students' experiences throughout the College and not just in one class or discipline.

### Contact CIE (The Center for Institutional Effectiveness)

**Yun K. Kim, Ph.D.**  
*Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness*  
yunkim@bergen.edu

**Tonia McKoy**  
*Director of Center for Institutional Effectiveness*  
tmckoy@bergen.edu

**Jesse Jacondin**  
*Research Assistant*  
jjacondin@bergen.edu

**Vannette John**  
*Technology Coordinator*  
vjohn@bergen.edu

**Judi Velazquez**  
*Administrative Assistant*  
mjvelazquez@bergen.edu

#### Affiliated Staff:

**Maureen Ellis-Davis**  
mellisdavis@bergen.edu

**Gail Fernandez**  
gfernandez@bergen.edu

**Ilene Kleinman**  
ikleinman@bergen.edu

**Joseph Mamatz**  
jmamatz@bergen.edu

**Mauro Marzocco**  
mmarzocco@bergen.edu

**Jill Rivera**  
jrivera@bergen.edu

**Shyamal (Sony) Tiwari**  
stiwari@bergen.edu