

Chapter XIV: YEAR-END UPDATE

During 2008, the University Assessment Committee was temporarily replaced by an Assessment Task Force, whose charge was to reevaluate the current institutional assessment plan. Led by the Dean of the School of Social and Cultural Studies, Dr. Doug Davenport, the Task Force worked for over a year on the process. The final report follows this section.

Structural reorganization of the University required reconsideration of representation on the Assessment Committee. In Fall 2009, the Assessment Committee was reconstituted with two students representing Student Senate, one faculty representative from each School, one Dean, two Associate Provosts, and the Provost.

University-level assessments continued as before, including administration of the CSXQ, CLA, junior test (CAAP or QRSR), Student Interview Project, senior tests, LAS Portfolio, Graduating Student Questionnaire, and the Alumni Survey. Discipline-level assessment is reported primarily in program reviews and on the discipline assessment website <http://disciplineassessment.truman.edu/>. The Employer Survey was distributed late in 2009, and results will be available in the *2010 Assessment Almanac*. The Staff Survey does not appear in this year's *Almanac* because it was last given in 2008. The College Portrait for Truman as part of the Voluntary System of Accountability continued under the direction of Dr. Marty Eisenberg, Associate Provost.

Both the University Conference and the Strategic Planning and Assessment Workshop provided opportunities for the University community to examine assessment data and/or consider current assessment initiatives. The University Conference was held February 19, and included breakout sessions such as:

- Providing Formative Feedback on Portfolios – Facilitators: Marty Eisenberg and Scott Alberts
- Satisfaction of Learning Outcomes Outside the Classroom – Facilitators: Brenda Higgins and JoEllen Flanagan
- Experiential Learning in the LSP: Definition, Implementation and Assessment – Facilitators: Patricia Mickey and David Hayes

The Strategic Planning and Assessment Workshop included review of core values and NSSE data. More details on this are available in Chapter XIII.

Under the direction of Dr. Scott Alberts, the LAS Portfolio is undergoing several groundbreaking developments. Current graduates are given a choice between completing the previously used Aesthetic Analysis and Scientific Reasoning prompts or the newly created Creative Work and Reflection prompt. New students will automatically generate submissions in their ENG 190, COMM 170, JINS, and Historical mode courses, ending with submissions in Critical Thinking and Writing, Interdisciplinary Thinking, Historical Analysis, and Most Personally Satisfying. Students are encouraged to save papers for a “late-breaking” submission, and include a cover letter with the final submission. Dr. Alberts has been working with a portfolio committee to investigate ways to provide feedback on portfolio performance to individual students. Full data from this year are available in Chapter XI.

For the Student Interview Project, Dr. Jeffrey Vittengl worked with student co-directors Constance Jordan and Sara Bozeman to study student quality of life. Students Nick Boice, Saed Hill, Peter Ruberton, Jennifer Schmidt, Nicole Sharp, and Paul Witte also served as part of the investigative team. An executive summary with analysis along with raw data can be found in Chapters X and XVIII of this year's *Almanac*. Dr. Elaine McDuff, Associate Professor of Sociology, was appointed to direct the Interview Project for the 2009-2010 academic year.

Truman completed the second year as a partner institution with James Madison University, investigating the validity of the Quantitative Reasoning test and Scientific Reasoning (QRSR) test. Results from the second year of data analysis were remarkably similar to those from the first year, suggesting that the high performance of juniors was stable across time. A smaller sample of first-year student data from Fall 2008 was also compared to junior data. The value-added approach suggests that juniors scored significantly better than first-year students, even controlling for initial ACT math and science scores. A more complete report is available in Chapter VII.

Work is continuing with ITS to establish an information warehouse to concentrate assessment test results with student class selection and performance to enhance research capabilities involving assessment concerns.

Assessment Task Force
Report to the Provost
October 22, 2009

Overview

During the fall semester of 2008, Provost Troy Paino convened the Assessment Task Force. This group was comprised of the following members: Doug Davenport, Marty Eisenberg, Ian Lindevald, Jeffrey Vittengl, and Candy Young. The charge of this group was to assess the assessment program at the University and to make recommendations regarding its future direction, scope, and activities. The task force attended a national conference, met regularly throughout the past year, and examined all aspects of the assessment program. The task force now provides this report with recommendations regarding the future of assessment on the Truman State University campus.

Guiding Principles

The task force had extensive discussions regarding the principles and underlying values that should guide assessment initiatives. The following statements represent the conclusions of the task force and we recommend that they be affirmed as principles to follow in our assessment program. It is important to also note that these statements are consistent with and reaffirm the principles held by the institution throughout our practice of assessment over the past 30 years.

1. Good assessment connects to student learning and achievement and the improvement of programs and the institution.
2. Good assessment provides evidence for accountability.
3. Good assessment provides data that is relevant and readily available in useful formats to individuals, programs and the institution.
4. Good assessment provides the foundational evidence for identifying successes and problems, informing deliberation, and evaluating the effectiveness of university initiatives.
5. Assessment results should not be used punitively in performance evaluations of faculty members.
6. Institutional leaders need to value, know and use assessment data and provide resources for others to do the same.
7. Good assessment should include direct, indirect, external and internal measures.
8. The assessment program should use faculty, staff and student resources efficiently, and revisions should value parsimony in light of scarce resources.
9. Assessment should be course-embedded where practical.
10. The assessment program should be reviewed regularly and modified, based on the needs of the institution.

Assessment of the Core Curriculum

Assessment in all areas should continue to be focused upon student learning outcomes. This is especially true for the core curriculum. Foundational learning outcomes – those expected of every student, irrespective of major or courses taken - should be assessed for all students in such a way as to demonstrate the unique contributions of the Truman learning experience and environment for students. This is best accomplished through a value-added approach that collects both baseline and summative data regarding student achievement of these outcomes.

Assessing student's growth in higher order thinking skills is the most challenging and important of these foundational learning outcomes. As the centerpiece of Truman's curriculum, higher order thinking also needs to be a centerpiece in the assessment system equal in importance to the assessment of the major. It is recommended that Truman review its current approaches to make higher order thinking a more visible element of the assessment system. The portfolio offers an internal, value-added assessment of student's critical thinking skills and Truman needs to investigate which external assessment instrument offers the best potential for an external, value-added assessment. Students should have multiple measures they can use to evaluate the impact of their Truman education on these important skills.

The core curriculum also lays the foundation for growth in areas such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, argumentation, and problem solving through its exploration of particular ways of understanding (currently manifested as "Modes of Inquiry"). Assessment of these multiple ways of understanding should continue to be assessed via the portfolio and other strategies developed by the faculty. The portfolio process's recent revisions to craft more value-added approaches to this assessment should help the university shift its assessment of the liberal arts core to more course-embedded strategies. Each student should be assessed on higher order thinking or a single way of understanding during the first semester on campus. This recommendation and the shift to more course-embedded strategies should lessen the assessment fatigue of students. The summative assessment activity for "ways of understanding" would occur as an embedded component in the relevant courses so that all students will have appropriate course artifacts for submissions in the portfolio and faculty will have the ability to review actual student work for the periodic UGC assessment of the core curriculum.

Various methods could be employed for these assessment activities. For example, collection of student work in the senior portfolio is an excellent direct measure of student learning. Strategically collecting work from early in the student's academic career could provide meaningful baseline data that can then be compared with works derived from courses intended to address the expected learning outcomes. This approach would require that the portfolio be revised to assure that appropriate work is collected near the beginning of the student's matriculation, as well as the point approaching graduation.

Other methods are also to be commended, to the extent that they can be course-embedded and provide direct measures of student learning. Examples of these methods are objective tests that are administered across all sections of certain courses, common test questions, common writing prompts, and/or learning activities (e.g., oral presentations, class demonstrations, etc). These are merely illustrative and not exhaustive. A wide variety of additional practices are well documented in the assessment literature that could be employed effectively.

Assessment in the Major

One of the foundational practices of our assessment program has been to evaluate student mastery of knowledge, skills and attitudes related to their major through the use of nationally-normed objective tests. In many ways, this practice has made Truman State University distinctive and provided clear and convincing evidence that our graduates are nationally competitive in knowledge of the major.

The task force recommends that we continue to require such exit exams of all students in all programs. In certain cases, no nationally-normed instrument is available for a specific discipline. Where this is the case, the program should investigate alternative means of providing external validation of student learning in that program. Additionally, these programs without nationally-normed instruments should consider crafting their own exam and having that exam reviewed by faculty at other institutions with strong undergraduate programs in the discipline.

Furthermore, programs should continue to use additional means of assessment in order to examine higher order thinking skills and other program objectives. This multi-method approach helps ensure that all indicators of program effectiveness are assessed and also supports the conclusions drawn from senior tests. The capstone course has served as a locus for many of these discipline-specific assessment activities and we recommend that this practice be reinvigorated.

Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness

Beyond the direct assessment of student learning, the University has historically assessed a variety of factors that contribute to student achievement and to institutional effectiveness. Through various instruments, we assess the level of student engagement, the effectiveness of academic advising, the support provided by staff and administrative offices, and other important elements of the campus environment.

We recommend that some, though not all, of these assessment activities continue. The next section identifies all assessment instruments routinely administered and provides specific recommendations regarding each of them. For those activities that remain, it is important to carefully review factors that impact the size of the assessment program: frequency of administration, instrument length and sampling strategies. This task has been an important aspect of the work performed by the Provost's Advisory Committee on Assessment and we recommend that they continue to perform that function.

Assessment Instruments

The university uses a wide variety of assessment instruments, some of which are locally developed and some that produced commercially. The following list summarizes these instruments and our recommendations regarding their further use. Table One presents the current assessment program and specifies the frequency of administration for each instrument.

- Portfolio Project – The portfolio is a flexible and useful assessment instrument that should continue to be used. However, students do not view the portfolio as an integral part of their educational experience and often perceive it as a more or less meaningless graduation requirement. As a means of combating this, we recommend that students be expected to submit portions of their portfolio throughout their academic career, rather than only requiring the submission during the senior year. We also recommend that students be able to participate in processes where they can receive some feedback regarding their portfolio.

- Senior Tests - We recommend that senior tests continue to be expected in every program and that every student participate. Nationally-normed instruments should be used where one is available and is appropriate to the learning objectives of the program. Where such a test is not available, the program should adopt another appropriate instrument or to create one. If creating an instrument, the program should consider having it reviewed by faculty or administered to students in a comparable program at a peer institution.
- Capstone Experience – Capstone experiences should remain in place. All students should be required to complete one that is appropriate to the major. Periodically, the university should highlight capstone assessment through workshops and inclusions of student projects at the undergraduate research conference or a similar capstone project conference.
- Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) – This has been used as a junior test for a number of years, though the most recent practice has been to use only the Math and Science modules. We recommend this test be discontinued unless specific modules are deemed appropriate for the value-added assessment of ways of understanding (Modes of Inquiry).
- Cooperative Institutional Research Program Freshman Survey (CIRP) – This survey provides some relevant demographic data, but otherwise the data is not used. We recommend that the CIRP be discontinued unless it is used in conjunction with participation in a national study, such as the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNSLAE-2). Otherwise, we recommend that appropriate demographic questions be included in other assessment activities conducted during the first semester.
- College Student Expectations Questionnaire (CSXQ) – This instrument is used in conjunction with the CIRP, such that all students complete one or the other during the fall semester of their first year. As with the CIRP, we recommend that this instrument no longer be administered.
- Student Interview Project – This is a valuable component of our assessment program and should be continued. It provides an opportunity to collect student feedback on topics of interest and does not require comprehensive student participation.
- Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) – The CLA was originally adopted to participate in a statewide initiative in relationship with RAND Corporation. Since then, we have also used it as a senior test for programs where no appropriate senior exam exists and as a component in the VSA. The CLA provides useful data regarding higher order thinking skills and should continue to be administered.
- National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) – The NSSE has provided useful data for student perceptions of the learning environment. Furthermore, NSSE data is submitted for the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA). We recommend that Truman continue to participate in the VSA and concomitantly, that we continue to use the NSSE.
- Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) – This instrument has provided useful data for student perceptions of their learning and their satisfaction with various aspects of the institution. We recommend that it continue to be used.

- Alumni Surveys – These are important instruments that should continue to be administered. The data should be collected on regular intervals, analyzed and shared with campus constituencies for use.
- Employer Surveys – These instruments can provide relevant data regarding the effectiveness of graduates and should continue to be administered.
- Staff Survey – This survey is administered every three years and is one of the few sources of information obtained from staff members. We recommend that it be continued.
- Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey (HERI) – This survey is administered every three years and provides important information regarding faculty perceptions of the campus environment and their work. We recommend that it continue to be offered.
- Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) – We have occasionally participated in this survey, which is administered in conjunction with the NSSE. The instrument can provide relevant data regarding faculty perceptions of student engagement that can be compared with the data obtained from the NSSE. We recommend that we continue to participate in this survey.

Table One – Our Current Assessment Program

Year	In-direct Assessment	Direct Assessment
Freshman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSXQ or CIRP (Fall) • NSSE (spring even numbered years) 	Approximately 150 take CLA instead of the survey
Sophomore		
Junior		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • James Madison University test (or) • Math and Science Modules of CAAP
Senior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GSQ • NSSE (spring even numbered years) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major Field Test (or) CLA • LAS portfolio
Various Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview Project 	
Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HERI every 3 years • FSSE occasionally in conjunction with NSSE 	
Alumni	5 and 10 years after graduation	
Employer	Every 3 years	
Staff	Every 3 Years	

In addition to these instruments, a number of offices and units administer surveys on a routine basis. Though these activities are not considered part of the assessment program per se, they are part of the larger examination of institutional effectiveness. Currently, Residence Life administers the Educational Benchmarking Inc. (EBI) College and University Housing survey annually to students living in the residence halls. Student Affairs also administers the EBI College Union/Student Center survey and the EBI Fraternity/Sorority survey approximately every three years. Information Technology Services and Pickler Memorial Library each administer an annual survey to obtain client satisfaction feedback. The Missouri Partners in Prevention program, in conjunction with University Counseling Services, administers the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) on an annual basis. Other surveys are given on an occasional basis but are not

listed here. As this shows, we collect a large amount of information from students beyond that collected through our assessment program.

Administration of Assessment

One of the concerns that we have is the number of surveys that students, faculty, and staff are asked to complete. This concern is due to the perception on the part of survey recipients that these instruments are a part of the University assessment program. That perception, though inaccurate, contributes to the belief that we “over-assess” our students. To address this concern, we recommend that survey instruments intended for broad distribution to students (including those identified in the previous section) be monitored by the Assessment Committee (perhaps a sub-committee created for this purpose) in order to ensure that there is no duplication of information requested and that surveys serve an appropriate University purpose.