

Chapter III: CURRENT ASSESSMENT PROGRAM: A BRIEF OVERVIEW & PHILOSOPHY

Truman State University is Missouri's statewide public liberal arts and sciences university. Truman is a highly selective, primarily undergraduate institution serving mostly traditional students in a residential setting, with an enrollment of 5,800 and a faculty of approximately 400. The University has been accredited since 1914 by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools; its academic programs are also accredited by a number of professional organizations and agencies:

- AACSB International – The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
- American Chemical Society
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs
- Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education
- Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs
- Missouri State Board of Nursing
- National Association of Schools of Music
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education

The assessment program at Truman includes a variety of direct and indirect measures in the form of exams, surveys, and performance assessments.

EXAMS:

Senior tests are required for every discipline. These are externally developed, nationally normed instruments. A student's graduation does not depend on the results of the senior test. The primary value is in evaluating the curriculum in the major field and identifying areas that might need revision. Discipline-specific senior tests include the Major Field Test (MFT), the MLA Cooperative Foreign Language Proficiency Tests, the Mosby AssessTest for Nursing, and the Area Concentration Achievement Tests (ACAT) for Justice Systems. (For a complete list, see Chapter IV.)

All juniors take either the College Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP) or the Academic Profile. The Vice President's Advisory Committee on Assessment Design and Implementation Group (DIG) is currently instituting several measures to improve student motivation on the junior tests:

- Students receive a letter from President Dixon explaining the significance of the assessment for the students and the University. Students will be reminded of this significance in a memo read to them at the beginning of the testing period.

- Students will take three of the five sections of the CAAP, reducing the testing period by forty minutes. (Previously, students completed four sections.)
- Students may now take the tests on January Conference Day and on this day only will receive a coupon for a free personal pizza upon completion of the test.
- Some of the testing sessions will be proctored by faculty rather than students.
- Students will receive notations on their transcripts if they perform well on the CAAP or Academic Profile: “Junior Test: Distinction” for 50th percentile and above and “Junior Test: High Distinction” for 80th percentile and above.

The hope is to see a significant improvement in students' scores as a result of these measures. Recipients of a 2003 Scholarship of Assessment Grant are currently working to assess these outcomes.

SURVEYS & INTERVIEWS:

All fall-entry first-time freshmen complete the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey during Truman Week. Two other nationally-administered surveys are a part of Truman's assessment program: the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) and the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The CSEQ is administered to juniors during their Junior Interdisciplinary Seminar. The NSSE is administered to a sampling of first-year students. Re-administration for the NSSE occurs during the senior year. Results are compared between first-year student responses and senior responses.

Since the 1992-93 academic year, Truman students and faculty have participated in interview sessions. One hundred juniors and/or freshmen are selected at random. Each student is interviewed by a student-faculty team and asked several open-ended questions about their learning experiences. The questions are developed every year by the Vice President's Advisory Committee on Assessment Design and Implementation Group. In Spring 2003, both juniors and freshmen were interviewed in order to evaluate the difference between incoming students' perspectives of the liberal arts versus junior students' perspectives.

The locally developed Graduating Student Questionnaire (GSQ) is administered to every graduating senior. Completion of the GSQ is a graduation requirement; students receive the survey in their graduation packets. Results are available by discipline and many disciplines include GSQ results in their five-year reviews to the State. December 2003 graduates will have the option to complete the GSQ online.

Truman also participates in the Higher Education Research Institute's (HERI) triennial survey of faculty and administrators. This survey provides information about workload, teaching practices, job satisfaction, and professional activities of faculty and administrators. Faculty attitudes and values, perception of the institutional climate, and interactions with students and colleagues are also measured. The next administration of the HERI Faculty Survey will be Fall 2004.

The first Staff Survey was administered in Spring 2003. This is a locally-developed instrument designed to assess staff members' levels of satisfaction with various aspects of the University. The Staff Survey also asks for responses regarding use level of campus facilities and importance of the University mission and institutional goals. This Survey was developed in response to requests from staff to have the opportunity to voice opinions and become more involved with the University assessment process.

Truman alumni are also surveyed. Additionally, employers of alumni receive surveys from those alumni granting permission. Truman learns what activities alumni are involved in and how employers view the capabilities and preparedness of our alumni.

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS:

Assessment tools include the Portfolio Project, capstone experiences, and the writing assessment.

The Portfolio Project is a sampling of a student's work, representing the student's intellectual growth at Truman, inside and outside the classroom. Students save their work immediately upon arrival at Truman and keep files through graduation. During the capstone course in the major, the students complete their portfolios. Ten years after graduation, students' portfolios are sent back to them. The Portfolio is especially effective in assessing Truman's Liberal Studies Program (general education) outcomes. The process of reviewing one's work in assembling the portfolio is itself a learning tool, since it encourages self-reflection. Portfolios are then reviewed and evaluated by faculty who use the evaluation process as a professional development opportunity. Though the immediate benefit is to the student, the University also learns much from the student portfolios.

The capstone is a culminating experience in each academic discipline. While the nature of the experience varies among majors, each requires students to reflect on their growth in knowledge, skills, and attitudes over the preceding several years and to demonstrate how they have integrated their learning experiences into a successful and satisfying whole. In addition to helping the learner achieve a kind of closure, the capstone experience also enhances continuous quality improvement in the curriculum of each degree program.

Truman State University is in the process of revising the writing assessment. A proposal went to the Undergraduate Council in November and again in December that, if approved, will institute a new writing assessment in the Fall of 2004. The new assessment will involve a three-pronged approach where students' writing samples are evaluated by faculty, and survey data pertaining to writing is reviewed. Since the proposal is still in the process of approval, more details will appear in the next issue of the *Assessment Almanac* in Fall 2004.

PHILOSOPHY & USE OF ASSESSMENT:

Truman's assessment program is ambitious in its intent and scope. It gathers data from each of the approximately 5800 students on campus every year. The data is used at the institutional and divisional level, but it is also used by the individual student. The comprehensiveness of the assessment system, as well as its implementation, makes assessment meaningful at Truman.

Each year at the summer Master Plan and Assessment Workshop, representatives from all disciplines on campus receive institutional and discipline-specific assessment and demographic data. They take these data back to their colleagues and are able to openly discuss findings and future directions. In addition to the summer Workshop, the January Conference was instituted in 2001 to disseminate findings, data, and to generate discussion. The Conference takes place over a one-day period and classes are cancelled in order to allow widespread faculty and student participation. One of the most important benefits of assessment is the data's ability to raise critical questions, thereby setting the institutional agenda for discussion and decision-making. The data can assist an institution in identifying problem areas and in monitoring programmatic change. By combining discussions about expectations for student learning, multiple pieces of assessment information, and informed faculty and staff analysis, institutional decision-making gains legitimacy and focus.

Truman believes in substantial faculty ownership of University assessments. Both the Portfolio Project and Interview Project are each directed by a faculty member. Faculty participate in reading the Portfolios, interviewing students, and teaching capstone experiences. Both assessment groups of the Assessment Committee are made up largely of faculty and chaired by a faculty member. Furthermore, the University instituted Scholarship of Assessment Grants in 2003 to increase use of available assessment data, to increase discipline-level assessment, and generally to stir faculty interest in assessment.

In late Fall 2003, a new website was added to the Truman Web that contains discipline-specific assessment data gathered from recent 5-Year Reviews and other sources. This website allows users to examine disciplines' survey data, program objectives, and statistics. This is a big step not only in increasing awareness of assessment on campus but also in sharing information on best practice.

Assessment for quality improvement and assessment for accountability are both embedded in the University's assessment philosophy. Truman is careful not to use assessment data punitively. Rather, data are used to incite discussion, support theories and statements, and assess outcomes. Wherever possible, multiple instruments are used to make a single determination.

Overall, assessment at Truman State University is a basis for change, improvement, and accountability. Data are shared campus-wide and with external constituencies. We focus on quality improvement. Ultimately, students are the benefactors of assessment. Aside from having multiple opportunities to reflect on their

learning and development at Truman, students also benefit from the feedback we have received from those students who came before them.

THE FUTURE:

The next two years will see several improvements to Truman's assessment program. A new Assessment Action Plan has been developed in response to requests from students, faculty, and staff. The Action Plan includes the following initiatives that have been undertaken by the Design and Implementation Group:

- Map current assessments to University core learning outcomes and identify areas for future enhancements;
- Develop a new writing assessment after identifying writing learning outcomes;
- Identify and implement an assessment for critical thinking;
- Identify or develop an assessment for computing literacy;
- Sponsor three workshops for assessment in the disciplines;
- Review the Graduate Student Exit questionnaire;
- Develop institutional effectiveness outcomes for the campus environment and services;
- Review the Graduating Student Questionnaire;
- Identify an instrument for assessment of student satisfaction and design its implementation (including role of GSQ);
- Review the role of the CSEQ and NSSE;
- Assess current level of student motivation by implementing the use of the Post-Assessment Survey;
- Review and implement feasible recommendations regarding communication to students made by the Motivation Subcommittee; and
- Review strengths and weaknesses of each strategy proposed by the Motivation Subcommittee. Recommend selected measures for implementation.

Additionally, the Analysis and Reporting Group is working on analyzing data from the CIRP and CSEQ to help answer questions about student retention. This Group is also involved with the Scholarship of Assessment Grant process. See "Future Directions" chapter in Volume II for more information.

The Assessment Committee continues each year to evaluate the various components of the assessment program to help ensure its efficacy.