

Chapter XVI: STRATEGIC PLANNING AND ASSESSMENT WORKSHOP

The assessment workshop focused on two important concepts of student learning. Critical thinking had been emphasized in institutional and programmatic learning assessment, and faculty in a recent survey (HERI, 2004) indicated that critical thinking skills are essential and central to a liberal arts education. This skill is assessed by both direct and indirect measures at several stages along a students' career. The CLA instrument (2006-2007) showed Truman freshmen at expected performance levels for total critical thinking skills as well as at each subtask of performance task and analytic writing which is further divided into making an argument and critiquing an argument. In the same year, Truman seniors scored below expected levels at the performance task and in critiquing an argument, but were at expected levels for analytic writing and making an argument. Results from the MAPP instrument (2006-2007) demonstrated that 32% of tested juniors were scored as "not proficient" in critical thinking. The Portfolio Project Critical Thinking scores revealed a similar trend with 32.2% of the submissions scored in the "weak" or "no evidence" category. Indirect measures from the CSEQ and the GSQ tended to echo results from the previously mentioned direct measures. This would lead us to believe that approximately 30-33% of Truman graduates are leaving campus with less than desirable abilities in at least some areas attributed to critical thinking skills and that the faculty should spend future attention as to where and how across the curriculum these subpar skills might be addressed.

Discussion at the workshop on the second concept included a review of Truman students' responses to NSSE (2006) benchmark items concerning engagement and their application to enhancing deep student learning. The histograms of responses can be found in the PowerPoint presentation slides in Volume III of this *Almanac*. It is interesting to note that in general, both Truman freshmen and senior students rate themselves fairly equally with the top 50% of all respondents to Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences and Supportive Campus Environment but rated these measures from 4.0 to 11.0 less than the Top 10% of responses. It is also interesting that freshmen and senior responses differ from the Top 10% with the same magnitude for Level of Challenge and Active and Collaborative Learning, but that seniors rated Student-Faculty Interaction, Enriching Educational Experiences and Supportive Campus Environment much lower than the Top 10%. However, the self assessment of these items by the seniors was much higher than the responses for the freshmen which would indicate an attitudinal advancement from the freshmen to the senior years for these same benchmark items. Participants were left with the challenge to ponder, "What one thing can we do to enhance student engagement and increase student success?"